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A R V A N ;

OR, THE STORY OF THE SWORD.

ARVAN;

OR, THE STORY OF THE SWORD.

A Poem by

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NOTE.—*The Story of the Sword is supposed to be told by an
ancient Bard.*

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ARVAN ;

OR, THE STORY OF THE SWORD.



CANTO I.

THE Chiefs had met in the high palace hall ;
For the great king held regal feast that night.
Round him were gathered all his mighty men,
Foremost in thought, or deed, through all the world ;
Some wise-browed, thoughtful-visaged, seamed and worn,
With their long wrestle with the sleepless years ;
Wearers of the dread silver crown, old men,
White-bearded, with calm luminous eyes, whose gaze
Saw far into the future ; Councillors
Were these of Arvan, highest in the realm,
Who gave wise laws unto the sons of men :
Others with massive fronts, and eagle eyes,
And strong-set mouths, whose faces yet were full
Of the red light of battle : these had been
In many a deadly conflict : death had looked
Into their eyes nor seen an eyelid droop.
Grand stalwart forms were theirs, towerlike and vast,
That though unarmoured, in their own great strength
Seemed yet arrayed for strife. Others were crowned
With jewelled diadems, whose many stones,

Fired into splendour by the cresset's flame,
Blazed like star-gems upon the brow of night ;
For these were kings ruling o'er wide-spread lands,
Over the arid regions, where the sun
Parches the earth with his too-fervent gaze ;
Over the northern realms, where ice eterne
Fetters the lands with spring-unbroken chains ;
Some, lords of desolate mountains, and the reach
Of lone sea-shores, or holding 'neath their sway
Sea-claspèd isles ; others, men-ruling kings,
Monarchs of populous cities, and of realms
Teeming with life ; yet, subject unto him,
Arvan, the king, whose sceptre over all
Stretched like a present fate. High on a throne
Glistening with ivory, and overlaid
With curious fretted work of burning gold,
Flashing forth crimson light, or sapphire blaze,
Or emerald gleams, or opal iris-flash,
Or diamond splendours from a thousand gems,
Sat the dread monarch in his lonely state.
The majesty of power uncontrolled
Was on his brow, and in his eye the strength
All undisturbed of one whose will was law.
Stately his form ; massive and strong of limb
As that of one of those stern images,
That sits in granite strength, solemn and still,
On Ari's burning plains, reared up by hands
That now are dead, in honour of her kings.
Far o'er his shoulders flowed, in ruddy waves,
The scarlet mantle, sign of sovereign sway,
Crusted with gold embroidery. Its folds
Parting in front, as when gold sunset clouds,

Dividing, show a glimpse of wintry sky,
Revealed the warrior breast, even at the feast
Bucklered with steel, that cast a chilly gleam
Blue, deathlike, down the hall. Whilst at his side
Shone with its own great light the diamond hilt
Of the charmed sword, the sword by demons given ;
The sword to which he owed his mighty sway
And dread renown, and victory's wreath of pine.

For in the days gone by (so runs the tale),
He had been hunting in the forest dim,
That with primeval gloom o'erclouds the lands
That front the northern seas. Then no wide realm
Was his, such as he ruled in later days,
Nor with his warrior name the high renown,
That made the word a battle-cry that drew
Triumph where'er it echoed, had been linked.
Only a king of winter-palsied lands
Populous, far-stretched beneath the northern heavens
Was Arvan then, mad lover of the chase,
Facing all hardships when the antlered deer,
Or tusky boar, or the grim sullen bear
Drew him from peopled lands into the waste,
And on a day, he, severed from his train,
In fleet pursuit of some wind-footed stag,
Had passed away, far from the haunts of men,
Into the grey depths of the forest old,
That clasps the man-tilled plains. Round him vast trunks
Of mighty pines rose naked through the gloom,
Striving towards heaven's light. Their sombre crests,
High up an hundred feet in air, close-woven
One with another, a dense roof of green,
Kept off from the cold earth the rain of rays

Even of the summer sun. A temple vast
Seemed the great wood ; its sombre roof upheld
On countless shafts of bronze. And 'neath the shade
O'er the space left betwixt the pine-trees stems,
Even till the sun sunk low in the blue heavens,
Rode Arvan on. Till, seeing night was near,
He called his fleet hounds from their vain pursuit,
Sprang from his horse, and with his front abased,
Touching the ground, spread forth his suppliant hands,
And prayed the sunset prayer. For in those days
Men bowed yet unto the One Supreme,
Nor worshipped carved images, nor knelt
Unto vain things fashioned by hands of clay ;
So to the Lord of Day, and to the Moon
Who silver-throned ruleth the silent hours ;
And to the uncounted stars, that nightly flame
In the blue plains of heaven, rose all the prayers
From human hearts, erring not from their path,
Nor seeking unto gods, that are no gods.
And Arvan, when his orisons were paid,
Fastened his charger to the barèd stem
Of a tall tree ; then laid him down to rest.

But when the first grey gleams of dawning day
Uncertain glimmered through the forest shade,
Showing the gaunt stems, spectre-like and vast
As shadowy phantoms of the world long dead ;
He rose from his deep rest that knew no dreams,
And through the forest wended slowly back,
Seeking the peopled regions, whence he came.

Now as he wended through the sunless glades,
Threading a lone vale in the mountain chain,
That from the savage lands sundered his realm,

Sudden he came, turning a rocky point,
Unto the base of a sky-seeking cliff,
That beetling rose o'er the green world of pines,
Its broad front bathed in the rose light of dawn,
While the great ocean of thick foliage tossed
Its numberless waves, with a weird sea-like sound,
Beneath its naked flanks. The mighty form
With all its rude magnificence of strength,
Scarce for an instant fixed the monarch's eyes ;
For at its base, upon the emerald slope,
Which stretched even to the margin of the wood,
Girt in on every side by countless pines,
That stood in circle round the precipice,
Like crested chiefs, that wait armed for the strife,
Obedient to a mightier lord's commands,
He marked, stretched on the dewy glistening grass,
Two beings, strange of aspect, whose swart limbs
And stunted forms spake them of spirit race.
Secure in fancied freedom from all fear
Of man's detested presence, in the light
Of the young dawn they stretched their uncouth shapes
Far from the cavern's mouth, whose deep black gloom
Veiled the descent to the dim under-world,
Where was their home. And Arvan, swift of thought,
Spurred on his charger 'twixt them and the cave,
Then drew his sword, cutting off all retreat.
And they, who have strength in their rocky home,
But are all powerless in the light of day,
Though lovers of its beams, confest themselves
Unfit to strive with him, a mortal born,
Though they were monarchs of the inner gloom ;
For that he, being man, was lord of earth,

And 'neath the sky had might to quench their spells ;
Their limbs too, strongly muscled as they were,
Yet short, deformed, availed them not to fly.
So, with low bending knee, in suppliant guise,
With hands close clasped, entreating, and with looks
Petitioning unto his feet they crept.
And he, undaunted, waited their approach,
Though his gaunt hounds, scared by the goblin shapes,
With stiffened hair, and staring eyes of flame,
Fled howling to the woods. Then said the king,
“Spirits, ye are my slaves ! See, I could bind
Your limbs, and take you from your cavern'd joys
To the detested homes of mortal men ;
There should ye pine, even as axe-felled trees,
That, stript of bark, are borne by the great strength
Of labouring oxen unto towns of men,
Pine for the forest homes they see no more.
But—for I would not make your lives a curse—
Hearken to that I offer. Ye may yet
Purchase your freedom, working my commands.
Fashion for me a falchion to my will ;
Its shining hilt shall be of diamond stone ;
Its blade, pure gold, shall shine even as the sun,
Dazzling with its bright beams weak human eyes ;
Its sharp edge shall avail to cleave the rocks
As though they were but water ; from its sheath
It never shall be drawn but a man's life
Shall by its power be quenched ; swift victory
Shall follow him who wields it in the fight,
So that its master shall be lord of earth.
Such shall my sword be. Ye can fashion it,
For that I know ye have all spirit-power ;

And ye shall swear by that dread oath, that binds
The mountain-spirits even to loathed tasks,
To bring it to me when a moon hath fled,
In the same hour, upon the selfsame day,
In this same place, as ransom for your lives,
Or ye shall pine in chains for evermore."

They saw the king's eye unacquaint with fear,
And knew his heart was harder than their rocks,
So swore to work his will. He drew aside,
And in the cavern's gloom they disappeared.

Swift fled the month on fleet, contrasted wings ;
This white, that sable, given by day and night ;
And at the appointed hour the king returned.
The spirits, faithful to their oath, were there,
And in their hands they bore the magic sword.

But, ere they gave the weapon to his hand,
They spake to him : " See thou our pledge redeemed,
Great king ! and the dread sword awaits thy grasp.
Yet fear thou still to claim it, though 'tis thine ;
For if thou dost despise our warning given,
Know well that all the guilt and misery
That surely follow spring from thee alone.
See, the fair hilt is of one diamond stone ;
And the bright blade, fashioned of purest gold,
Shines as the sun ; and, hardened by our spells,
It shall divide the rocks even as the wave ;
Ne'er shall the blade be drawn from out its sheath
But some life shall be closed ; swift victory
Waiteth on him who wields it, like a slave.
Yet, if thou take unto thyself the sword,
Know it will bring, in some far future hour,
Mightiest of woes upon thy realm and thee."

The king, who, with a curling lip of scorn,
Had silent waited till the dwarfs were still,
Stretched forth his hand upon the diamond hilt.
“Mine be the sword,” he said; “I fear not Fate.”
Then, as the impulse came on him to prove
The magic falchion’s strength, he plunged the blade
Deep in the hard breast of the granite cliff,
And drew it forth unscathed; but the dwarfs fled
Through the cave’s mouth down to the undergloom.—

Now, from the day when Arvan won the sword,
So said the voice of Fame, a mighty change
Came o’er his spirit. He no longer cared,
As in the former years, to wage fierce war
Incessant with the wild things of the earth:
His strength was turned against the nations now,
And the wide race of men became his prey.
Land after land lay powerless at his feet,
Crushed by the stern king and his pitiless glaive;
In vain the nations flung their hoarded wealth;
In vain with eager hope or grim despair,
They hurled their very lives into War’s chasm,
That gaped before them eager to devour;
For that abyss closed never. Ceaselessly,
With an augmenting rage, more widely yawned
The life-destroying plague; and all that earth
Had then of beautiful, or brave, or good,
Was swallowed up in the deep, ghastly grave.
But Arvan’s name became a word of fear;
And Arvan’s throne became exalted high
Above all warrior thrones that were on earth.—
And Arvan from the latest of his wars
Had now returned. Myriads of foemen’s lives

Lay crushed beneath the red destroying wheels
Of his triumphal car. From fairest cheeks
The light had waned, quenched in grief's bitter tears ;
And wild-eyed widows wailed their slaughtered mates ;
And little starving children sireless mourned ;
And mothers, weeping o'er their lifeless sons,
Would not be comforted ; and all the land
Lay charred and black, scathed by the fiery scourge,
Black as a forest in the unpeopled lands
O'er which the desolating flame hath past ;
For in those days, who faced the northern sword
Perished before the sharpness of its steel.
Nor hitherto breathed there a king on earth,
Who, haught of heart, arraying him for war,
Had gazed on Arvan's face nor turned and fled.

So Arvan triumphed. On his lofty throne
Silent and grave he sat ; cheerful of heart,
Though smiling not his pleasure : for he knew
Men's souls were filled with a yet deeper awe
Through this new conquest. His a warrior mind,
Brave, strong as iron, feeling not a whit.
Hard was he, even as the granite rock
In nature, being a mighty conqueror ;
Nor thought he took that men's homes were laid waste,
Nor heeded children's cries, nor widows' tears,
Knowing such things must be upon the earth.
So the red blood that, wheresoe'er he past
On his victorious way, flowed in dark streams,
Crimsoning the lands with soil-enriching tides,
To him was as the unregarded wave
That through some mountain wild, unmarked of men,
Steals onward to the main. Mighty was he,

Chiefest of all the warrior-kings that were,
Swift with the sword, sent of the gods to slay.

So the sad realm which Arvan had o'ercome
Mourned low in ashes ; and the red wine flowed,
In honour of that mighty victory,
Freely as the red blood by which 'twas won.

Thus past the hours, until the first pale gleams,
Silvery and pure, of the approaching morn,
Stole on the lurid radiance of the hall,
Gently, as steal the first sweet thoughts of love
Into a hot heart filled with hate and strife.
Then rose the king. High over all the guests
Towered his imperial form, as the Ur peak,
Its shoulders crimson with the sunset glow,
Shows o'er the lesser hills that gird him round.
Instant to left and right, from brazen throats
Of clamorous trumpets, stormed tempestuous blasts,
Commanding silence, and a great voice cried,
" The king hath risen." Then, while o'er all the throng
Sank a death silence, the great monarch spoke,
" Kings, nobles, chieftains, ye, who at my side
Have faced rejoicing the gaunt spectre War,
And tamed his terrors ; victors from the strife
Ye have once more returned. I will not thank
The loyal hearts, who are my kingdom's guard,
For thanks, howe'er expressed, are payment still,
And I would have free service from the free.
Nor will I vaunt your courage often proved,
Courage to strong hearts is its own reward.
But I would ask you to behold the work
Which your keen swords and your strong arms have
wrought.

From the White Sea to where the southern waves
Ripple in sunlight on the golden shore,
No hostile flag flaunts its defiance now.
Our own good blades have beaten down the realms,
Captives or slain are they who were our foes,
Stormed are their utmost mountain fortresses,
Nerveless the strong arms which defied our might,
And the proud hearts, all tamed, have sued for peace.
Only the western king still dares our wrath,
Relying on his unattempted strength
And multitudinous hosts of armed men.
But his last hour has struck. He from his throne
Far-shining, wide-renowned, flung to the dust
Shall own his Lord. For, Chieftains, unto me
White peace is loathed, while yet a foe remains
To mock my power. I am the lord of earth.
The nations have been given unto my sword,
Like meat unto the prey-beasts' shining teeth ;
Their lands are tilled of them with weary toil,
And bring forth fruit to store my granaries.
Their kings are but my servants, who bear sway
While I permit ; but when I frown, retire
Into the mass of undistinguished slaves,
Who do my bidding, fearing much my wrath.
Have not Ivora's chiefs stooped to my sway ?
Valiant and wise were they, foremost in fight,
Their men of war in wolf-like multitudes
Darkened the land, wasting where'er they past.
Lo ! they are fallen, and their thrones are void.
Have not wide Ari's kings, with countless hosts
Of quiver-bearing men, assailed our realm,
Trusting to drag our banners in the dust ?

Where are the dark kings and their locust swarms
Of arrow-darters now? Last the great lord,
Whose iron sceptre ruled the sunny lands,
Dared, vain of heart, to match his strength with ours.
He came, with myriads on fleet-footed steeds,
Shaking the earth beneath their thunder-path;
He came with iron-fenced ranks of men,
Their lances showed afar off like a wood
Of pines unnumbered on the ragged flanks
Of the Ur mountains, when the glittering stars
O'er-twinkle them, like well-ground points of steel.
He came, he met us on the battle-plain,
His hosts were trampled down into the slime,
Red with much blood of men. He a chained slave
Waiteth in dungeon for the death decree.
Far o'er the plains his chariots fled away;
His people fled. Vain was their maddened speed,
For the swift sword o'ertook them in their flight.
Now may the wolves and bears flesh their white fangs
Upon the mighty men. Upon the hills,
And through the vales, they in their shining arms,
Lay thick as drops upon the autumn grass,
When the white fog deserts the misty plain.
But our last task remains. This king must fall—
Emeth, who, being harnessed for the fight,
Vaunteth himself our equal. He must fall.
To your strong arms and warrior hearts I trust,
Chieftains, his chastisement. Then shall the world
Be subject unto us from shore to shore,
And the vexed nations shall at last have rest.
Chieftains, the battle-feast hath touched its end.
Hath it not been our custom from of old

To serve the gods, who from the heights of heaven
Rule o'er the subject fates of mortal men?
Therefore I bid you to the sacrifice
That in the mid-day hour is offered up
To the bright god who grants us victory.
See ye the grey dawn even now doth break.
Soon on his golden car the god will rise
And look propitious on his worshippers.
Chieftains, at the dread mount of sacrifice
We meet again." Then raised he his hand
In token of dismissal, as of old
Hath been the custom with the northern kings.
Up rose the warrior crowd. A mighty shout
From out their bearded lips rang through the hall,
Making the smoke-dyed rafters in the roof
Vibrate with that great cry, "Live long, oh! king."

Then, through the yawning doors, the goodly stream
Of mighty men poured out into the day:
They moved along, rejoicing in their strength.
As when the ice, around the northern pole,
Bound by the Frost-king, breaks its winter's rest
When the spring sun returns; then through the straits,
'Twixt the high cliffs, the towering icebergs pass,
With crests all jewelled by the solar rays;
So moved the glittering crowd forth from the hall.

But Arvan, with his chosen men of war,
And prudent counsellors, and aged men,
Had through an inner portal past in state
Into his room of council, there to build,
Through warrior thought, the broad-based plan of war
That should avail to tame the warlike West.
Thus purposed Arvan, to await the hour

When he should don the crown, and take the sword
Of sacrifice, seeking the sacred hill.

Without, the people argued much of war ;
For all the feasters, ere they sought their homes,
Spake largely of the strife. And of the young,
Many desired war, hoping in the fray
To win fame by the smittings of their swords,
And also wealth ; for youth hopes ever much,
Being yet full of the fierce fire of life,
Nor taking thought of failure, nor of death.
But in the greybeards' hearts, who through long days
Of varying existence, thinking much,
Had marked life and its changes, other thoughts,
Unsanguine, of the western war had place.
For they forboded ill. And Morar said,
" Heard ye the king ? he meditates new war.
Surely he loveth strife." Karlak replied,
" What wonder though he love it passing well ?
Did we not drink from gold within the hall ?—
Of yore we drank from silver." To him spake
His fellow, " We have yellow for the white ;
But the changed colour, it hath cost much blood."

Then Oron, rich in ships and merchandise,
Who walked beside them, listening to their speech,
Took up the word, and said, " Arvan is brave,
And hath prevailed greatly o'er his foes.
The kingdom is increased through his might,
And much gain grows therefrom to trading men,
Peaceful, whose souls shun the red fields of war.
Yet let him take heed, for the path of strife
Is full of chances strange. Even strong men
On its rough, slippery ways have sudden reeled,

Fallen, and yielded unto others place,
Being of fate down-trodden in the mire.
What unto others hath aforetime chanced,
Lightly may come to him. The steel-tipped spear,
That oftentimes hath stricken through the shield,
Being o'er-used, full oft breaketh at last."

Thus musèd the old men, considering life
With age-informèd eyes. Talking at large
Of war and its events, that strangely chance,
In mode all undivined of human heart,
Unskilled to read the future in the past.

Meantime, through all the city's populous ways,
In palace homes adornèd with much gold,
Marbles, and tapestry, exceeding fair,
Such as the heart of man delights in much;
Also in huts and dwellings of the poor,
Where unregarded men are born and die,
From age to age; none noting of their birth,
Nor of their deaths, for that their worth is scant,
The voice of wailing from the women rose.
Mothers lamented for their lovely sons,
Strong like to gods, who, born with extreme pain,
Had much rejoiced their hearts through many days,
But whom their fear saw slain by the swift steel,
In distant lands; feeding the vulture's greed,
Or rent by the wild beast's defacing claws;—
Therefore their hearts lamented, being sad,
And unto those who comforted, they said,
Replying, for their souls would not regard
Accents of consolation, or of hope—
"What is the pine-wreath of red war to us,
That kings and warrior-men, spilling much blood,

Rejoice in having won ? For that they die,
Our fair young sons. Upon a hundred plains
The bones of Northmen whiten on the sand.
Yet there did Arvan conquer. 'Tis the same
Whene'er he warreth, overthrowing kings.
Why should we then delight us in his war ;
Wherefrom he wins power and large wealth of fame,
Given by lips, which things he doth desire,
Wherefrom we gain but loss ? Why should we joy ?
This war will be as others that have been :
Surely he conquers ; but our children die."

CANTO II.

King Arvan sat in his great council hall,
Girt by his war-men and wise councillors ;
Erect he sat upon the counsel stone,
Waiting to hear the truth-words. For of old
It had been 'stablished by the laws of men,
That when the greyheads and the war-chiefs met
In solemn conclave for the kingdom's weal,
The king should on the counsel rock be throned :
(A massive fragment was the rock, of yore,
Torn from the great cliff, whose precipitous height
Columned with basalt, lifts its awful head
O'er the black waves that scourge the northern shore) ;
So when the wise men or the warriors spake
Words of grave prudence, then the king should hear,
This was the meaning of the basalt throne,
The counsel, even though grievous, with a heart
Firm as the basalt throne whereon he sat.

Silent round Arvan sat the leaders now,
Like to the shapes, which in the hall of gods
Each on his golden seat, crownèd with light,
In his right hand bearing the golden wand
Wherewith they have sway over earthly lives,
Sit before Ur, father of gods and men,
Eldest of all existences that are,

Who, through all years, upon the azure throne,
Made of one sapphire, sits and ruleth all.
Thus sat they waiting for their monarch's speech,
For that they knew that he would utter words,
Weighty and worthy to be thought upon.

Then Arvan op'd the portals of his lips,
Uttering words, while those worn warrior chiefs
And grey-haired men, eager, with ears attent,
Drank in his speech, as the wide silent waste
Of herbless sand, that bucklers Ari's heart,
Drinks in the dews of the o'erarching heavens.
"Chieftains," he said, "ye, who have oft in fight
Buttressed the failing fortunes of the day
With hearts more fearless than your own good swords ;
And ye, grey councillors, whom the wise gods,
Propitious, from the all-devouring waves
Of wasting time, have, for our kingdom's weal,
Out of the general wreck of earthly things,
Guarded to teach truth to the later days,
Arvan the king, claimeth your counsel now,
Touching this war, whose dark menacing waves
Like the arising billows of a flood,
Break on the threatened landmarks of the West.
Speak ! the king's ears are open." Then a calm
Sank thoughtful on the leaders of the war,
And on the agèd men, while, wise of heart,
They pondered thoughts that might avail the land.

Not long the silence lasted. Then arose
Moran the Agèd. On his reverent head
An hundred years and four their snows had cast.
In days long fled, he too upon his thigh
Had girt the warrior sword, and sought to slay ;

But the pale winters of a lifetime now
Had iced his blood, that thawed not when the spring
Rose-bright came down to earth, wakener of flowers,
Giver of fervent life. Him nevermore
The tide of fight should see, parting those waves,
Whose shining crest is steel, even as a man,
Strong swimming, parts with brawny practised arms
The ridged ocean-mounds. Ne'er would his voice,
Whose roar was heard above the battle din,
Even as a bear's roar rises o'er the rage
Of the great whirlpool, fire the warrior's breast
Into prevailing fury. Far behind
Lay the great deeds, that in his earlier days
Rose high in heaven's light, and drew the eyes
Of the earth-sons. War-deeds of lesser chiefs
Were now in all men's lips, but his forgot,
Or seen dim in the distance, giant shapes,
Viewed through the gathering mists of many years ;
Even as to him who journeys through the vale
That leadeth downward to the inland sea,
Show the Pale Mountain's summits high in heaven,
"Arvan," he said, for in the council hall
The king wore not his title, but men spake
As equals with each other, knowing that
Which had been uttered in the ancient days,
"Wisdom is better than a crown of gold."
"Arvan, thou seekest to adore the sun,
When the great orb hath dipt below the wave.
What room remains for counsel when thy voice
Even now hath said the steel-unsheathing word
Decreeing war ? Far better had it been
Haddest thou first, even as thy mighty sires,

Ta'en counsel of the wise men of the realm ;
Nor with thine own hand barred the silver doors
Of peace, and oped the iron gates of war.
Yet hearken to my speech, for I have seen
Both many years, and changes upon earth ;
And though not honeysweet, my words have truth.
Thou lovest war too fiercely. Many years
Has thy sword raged over the wasted world,
Eating up realms, making the earth-sons mourn.
Just is red war, waged on a nation's foe ;
Nor is hot battle hateful to my heart,
For I, too, chieftains, though this arm is now
Wasted, and fallen my strength, once led the hosts
Of shield-uplifting men. Nor is my blade,
Though eaten with the rust of many years,
Unknowing how to spill red blood of men.
Nor hath the foe e'er looked on Moran's back,
For dear the strife-storm was unto his soul,
And the red rose of battle-fields a joy.
But thou, oh ! Arvan, lovest nought save war.
White-fronted peace is banished from thy realm ;
Thou dost not strike against a single land ;
Lo ! all the nations are thine enemies,
And, where there breathes a man, there is thy foe.
Yet be thou warned in time, though loving strife.
Not always victors from the battle-field
Do the war-lovers turn. As yet thy sword
Hath struck resistance down, as the white bolt,
Launched by the angry sun-god, beats to earth
The acorn-crownèd monarch of the woods ;
But all men live under the jealous stars,
Who give not unto any child of man

To wear the crown of unredeemed success ;
But, or they send to him reverse in arms,
Or do afflict him with great grief of heart,
Or pining sickness wastes his life away.
Thou triumphest, great Arvan, haught of heart :
Yet know thou surely other days draw nigh ;
Nor ever rose the ocean on the flood
But the ebb surely followed. Be thou warned,
If all too late it be to bind in chains
The war-hounds thou hast loosed, whose awful mouths
Are hungry clamouring for a mortal prey,
Bid thou the strife cease and recal the chase,
When the great West king, driven into his realm,
Like a grim bear forced to his inmost cave,
Meaning to rend his foes, turneth to bay.
Tread not the war-path to its utmost verge ;
Cross not the yellow river of the West ;
For that beyond the stream rule other gods,
Who bow not to the North gods' warrior sway,
And pale defeat waits all who pass the wave."

He ceased ; and all the listeners drew a long deep breath
Of sweet relief, for that the words were harsh,
Stirring men's hearts like to a funeral knell.

Then the king spoke again : " Chiefs, ye have heard
Moran the Agèd's counsel. Is it good ? "

He ceased ; and on his right hand Nardon rose ;
Sprung from the giant race, who, in old days,
Smote with unsparing swords the weary earth :
Soul of the strife was he, slayer of men.
Low o'er his brow hung his black shaggy hair ;
His dusky beard involved his breadth of face,
Covering the cheek-bones even to the eyes :

Fierce eyes were they, that, through the narrow rift
Left 'twixt the hair and beard, glared hungry forth ;
As the keen winter stars, tearless and bright,
Gaze through a chasm betwixt black pine-tree boughs.
To him the wise men and the chiefs gave heed,
For that his mace devoured lives of men ;
But some among the gray-haired, gentler-browed
Than were their fellows, wore a troubled look,
As though they loathed his words, for they knew well
That his harsh counsel ever dripped with blood.

Then Nardon spake : " Moran is wise," he said,
" But Moran's days are many. He hath store
Of patient wisdom, hived in the long years ;
But the hot heart of warfare-loving men
Is his no more. Let Moran teach wise laws
Unto the sons of men. In the black ranks
Of shielded men his place is vacant now.
Time, like a mighty chasm, doth lie between
Him and the strife-fields of his earlier days ;
And his faint eyes, dim with the toil of years,
Unsurely see across the far abyss.
But, Arvan, hear my words ; for they are truth.
I counsel, seeing that the western king
Submits not to thy will, and dares the war,
I counsel that we smite, and do not spare.
Spill their red blood on earth ! Why should we stay ?
What ! are their swords soft-hearted unto us,
That we should sheathe ours when the fight is won ?
Let the glaive eat up their young men, and all
Their men of war. Let the rough soldier drag,
From where they crouch down by their parents' knees,
With pale, fair faces, and much wealth of hair,

Their virgins, shrieking, to captivity.
Let the wild mothers o'er their slaughtered babes
Howl lamentation, cursing the dread skies,
Who watch earth's woes, unheeding. It is well
That they should suffer who have lost the day.
So had they used us, had our swords failed.
Lo! Moran's words are weak. He bids us spare
Whom we have smitten. See! the thought is vain;
For the crushed nation must be friend or foe.
And should we smite them sore, and then draw off,
Leaving them mortal foes, yet unsubdued,
That were as though the hunter should retire
From the light-wounded, whelpless lioness,
And in her angry presence woo repose.
But if Moran would say, 'Refrain from war,
When the red strife is won; winning their hearts
By showing mercy:' Learn, the thought is vain.
For hearts deep pierced do never lightly heal;
And conquered men will hate their conquerors,
And mercy maketh but faint friends at best.
Hear, Arvan; for my thought is wiser far:
Let us arise, and grapple with the foe;
And if our good swords conquer, quench the life
Of the strong realm in blood for evermore;
For the slain foe vexes no man again."

Dashing his hand upon the council-board,
He sat down, greatly frowning; for the thought
Of war had stirred up the unslumbering wrath,
Coiled like a serpent in his savage soul.
But o'er the room an awful silence sank;
For even warrior-hearts were half subdued,
Calmed by the unchained fury of his tone.

It was as when a lion's angry roar
Shakes the dark purple cavern of the night:
All lesser cries of various-speaking beasts
Are hushed, and earth is quiet as a tomb.

Then Arvan spake again, "Chiefs, ye have heard
Nardon, the Slayer's counsel; is it good?"

And ere the echo of the words had ceased,
Facing the strong-limbed giant, rose a chief,
Youngest of all was he, who, wise of heart,
Or strong of hand, spake in the council-hall.
Lygrul, the son of Cardol, silver-speeched,
Yet swift in war to wield the burnished blade.
Keen, watching eyes were his, lynx-like and bright,
That seemed not to see when seeing most.
Thin was his face, and thoughtful; though the years
Had graved few wrinkles on the pale, clear brow
That gleamed forth from his bright, brown wealth of hair,
Like a chalk-cliff, that jutteth boldly forth
Out of the bright, brown wealth of autumn woods.
Lean were his cheeks, the mouth quiet, and hard,
With the lips firmly pressed, as though they feared
That some true word might pierce unto men's ears.
Nor hand nor foot he moved, when that he spake,
And a great quiet reigned on all his face.
But his was as the quiet of the grave,
Which, through the long years, uttereth no sound,
Yet eateth more men than a beast of prey.
"Arvan," he said, "and ye, assembled chiefs,
Mighty to rule, wise-hearted, strong in fight,
Over the realms your prowess hath subdued,
Ill it beseems me, who am young in days,
To speak in presence of the grey-haired ones

Whom the years, rich in wisdom, have endowed
With knowledge that doth fit them, being men,
To rule, even as gods, the sons of earth.
Nor is my sword renownèd in the war,
Cunning to break the ranks of shielded men,
And turn their best to flight, like Nardon's sword,
Eater of warriors, terror of the foe :
Yet would I pray your patience for a while ;
For that the wise gods, for a kingdom's weal,
Do not unseldom put a prudent word
Into a young man's mouth, bidding him speak.
Lo ! now, touching this war. Arvan hath said
That the realm needeth war ; therefore, 'tis well,
For Arvan's heart is wise, he judgeth right,
Nor would he plunge his kingdom into strife
Wanting just cause and fit. Yet Moran saith,
Whose head is whiter than the silver snow,
That rests through winter days on the blanched peaks
Of the Ur Mountains, Moran, wise of heart,
Whose thoughts are taught him of the all-wise gods,
Saith that he counselleth not ceaseless war ;
And Moran's words, oh, Arvan ! are not weak,
For unchecked war is as a reinless steed,
Which bears its rider fleetly o'er the waste
With fury unrestrained, but in the end
Flingeth to earth his lord, a lifeless corpse ;
Therefore 'tis well that war should sometimes cease,
Yet not such war as doth increase the realm.
And for this storm of conflict that doth now
Summon its menacing clouds in black array,
I counsel that we face it with brave hearts,
Nor cease till the tamed foe sueth for peace ;

Then keep we still the great advantage won
By the sharp northern sword that striketh well.
Yea ! let us grant peace to them, a wise peace
Given out of mercy to a vanquished foe ;
Yet given in truth through guile to break his strength,
And bring his people very low and weak,
And waste like hidden poison all the life
Of the brave race, till armed courage fails.
So on occasion fitting we may goad
The foe, slow-mined by enervating peace,
To ill-advised renewal of the war ;
Then with sapped courage, weaponless and weak,
Lightly we shall o'ercome him. He shall be
Like a bear trapped in a hidden pit
That haply if hard prest in the hot chase,
Mighty in fangs and claws would rend the hounds ;
But being taken slily unawares
Helpless is butchered by the hunter men."

He paused, and when no more the soft sweet voice
Stirred the great quiet of the counsel hall,
It was as when a tuneful silver bell,
That hath been speaking, suddenly is still.
So when the great king spoke again, his voice
After that sweet low melody of words,
Broke on the ear like avalanche's roar
On the soft murmur of a mountain rill ;
And Arvan said again, " Chiefs, ye have heard
Lygrul the crafty's counsel, is it good ?"

Then on the right hand slowly there arose
From his oak council chair, hung with the spoils
Of spotted pard, ta'en in the southern war,
A chief of mighty fame, friend of the king.

Swarthy his face in hue. His massive brows,
Ridged high with many cells of stored thought,
Showed like to unsmooth giant-built walls,
Whose awful strength towers o'er the subject plains ;
His keen clear eyes filled with a spirit-fire,
Unwildered by the tumult of near life,
Such gift of prescience had he from the gods,
Saw that which shall be ere its birth in time.
His high and resolute nose from out the face
Rose, as the bronze beak of a ship of war
Juts from the rounded prows. Beneath, the mouth
Rested in strength, with firm and unpressed lips,
Supported by the massive jaw below.
Such were the mighty features of the face ;
Yet was the head not vast, but small and fine,
And on the neck set with a delicate poise,
Inclining to the left, even as a man's
Who listens heedful for a far off sound ;
Strong was the neck, even as a mountain bull's
That doth endure unscathed the furious jar,
When, fired to madness by the fervent spring,
With broad horned front, madly he smiteth down
All rivals who essay his herded cows.

Now the defect which Irach had from birth—
Whence his foes called him " Irach the deformed "—
Was grievous unto Irach's soul in youth,
And in the chambers of his heart he said :
Though the head slant upon the neck is set,
It shall think wiser thoughts than the well-poised,
Bringing yet huger honours to its lord.
And though they cry " Deformed," it shall be seen
In the front ranks of man-destroying war,

When the sleek slanderers' straight forms keep afar.
And this thought had impelled him, as a spur
Dashed in the galled flanks of a generous steed,
Drives it against the lances of the foe.
So that his mind ruled in the council-room,
And his sword mightily prevailed in fight,
Till he was honoured of all men that lived ;
And they said, whensoever his name was named,
" Irach the Mighty !" While his voice prevailed
To sway the changeful fortunes of the realm
More than ten myriad cries of lesser men.
" Arvan," he said, " wise men, and warrior chiefs,
Moran hath spoken ; others have said well ;
Yet may some error mingle with their speech,
Which he who listeneth lightly may discern ;
For even the gem's clearness shows the flaw
But more distinctly unto watchful eyes.
Suffer me then to speak words in your ears,
Which dawned, I listening, on my anxious mind.
Lo ! for the war, it cometh, therefore now
Is need thereof no more of counsel words,
For Arvan's war-sword, even now unsheathed
Shines outstretched menacingly towards the West,
Nor may it be re-scabbarded. 'Tis ours
Only to counsel of the form of strife,
Not whether strife shall be. Arvan, whom Heaven
Made lord of lands and nations, as thy sword,
Like to the sword of Ur, hath overthrown
Realms in the former days, so yet again,
It smiting, shall thy foe be overthrown.
Lo ! when thy will is worked, and triumph smiles
Sunlike upon the armies of thy land,

What thought shall then be chosen of our souls ?
Should we refrain our warriors from pursuit ?
Should we restrain our fleet, victorious hosts,
When triumph, spoil of war, is won at last,
Nor suffer them to pass the western stream ?
This were to leave the foe, stung with defeat,
Unmaimed in vigour, like a spurned snake,
That deadly-fanged recoils ready to spring.
This should we do, oh chiefs ! fearing the gods
Who rule the western land, and fearing fate ?
Surely the equal stars shine upon all,
And here as there will guard their worshippers.
Nor need we fear too greatly unseen fate,
For that the strong heart moulds its destiny,
And fate smiles ever on well-sharpened swords.
Therefore if war must be, let it be waged
Fierce, without pause, till armed resistance dies. —
What shall our hearts choose having won the day ?
Shall we, triumphant, add fresh blood to blood,
Smiting the foe when he hath dropt the glaive ?
Oh, Arvan, see, for evil is the thought ;
Strong is a nation driven to despair—
Strong as a madman whose one arm avails
To scatter many reason-ruled men.
Fierce were the struggle ere we quenched the life ;
Many the red gaps riven in our ranks ;
Nor would swift triumph heal them. What avails
To lay the wide lands waste with fire and sword ?
Kingdoms enough to deserts have we turned,
Where banded wolves roam the deserted fields,
And shaggy bears couch by the thrones of kings.
Fairest of lands were they till that we came

With desolation in our armed hands.
Drear is their aspect now. In the void fields
No busy delver plies his fruitful task ;
Mute are the cities, voiceful once with men ;
And a great gloom of death dwells on them all.
Surely 'twere well the sword should rest at last.
Say that the races wherewith we made war,
Destroying them even to the very ground,
Were as a cancerous sore, that eats up earth,
Even as an ulcer preys upon man's frame ;
That our sharp sword was but the healer's knife,
Cutting out utterly the gangrened flesh.
Thus may it be with races of the earth,
Savage, not e'er to be redeemed by word
Nor deed of mercy, for their souls are wild.
Not in them is the milk of human love,
Nor thought of wisdom, as befitteth men.
Such races is it lawful to erase
From the earth's surface, as a toiling man
With broad bill lops away a noxious weed,
Then with sharp pronged tool digs out the root.
Lest life remaining it might rise again.
Thus is it not with the great western folk,
But they are equals with us, having souls
Knowing the past and future ; now our foes,
Yet who might prove in peace-hours helpful much.
Having minds wise and prudent, of the gods
Given, as the warrior heart is to the North ;
Therefore they, bartering, gain pleasant things.
Whereout arises profit to the land,
And store of much rejoicing to men's souls.
Shall they not toil for us, they being spared,

Subject unto King Arvan, lord of earth ?
Wherefore destroy them not ; for a king's strength
Lies not in dead hands, but in living hands,
That, toiling, may accomplish all his will.
Or soon, or late, the land will be our own.
Better to reign o'er realms peopled with men
Than wastes o'erwandered by the beasts of prey.—
But shall we say, 'the land were sooner ours
Destroyed we its manhood utterly,
Erasing from it all resisting life.
Thus were this conquest, whereunto our hearts
Yearn in all strength, more speedily fulfilled ?'
Oh ! Arvan, we may conquer overmuch,
Advancing with all unpropitious speed.
Hold thou thy hand, refraining still in time.
Where the flood spreads o'er-swiftly o'er the plains,
Its waters being void of depth, retire.
A kingdom groweth as the ocean grows,
That is not fillèd swiftly in one night,
But by the silent growth of centuries,
The work divine of ever-labouring streams,
Waxes so great, being replenishèd,
That the long drought, and heat of summer suns,
Spend on it thenceforth all their might in vain,
Making it not even by one hair's-breadth less.
Thus should thine empire grow. Not thy son's sons
Should view the task accomplished. Thou dost lay
The deep foundation of the glorious pile ;
Strive not to place on the sky-piercing tower
Also the crowning stone. For other hands
The gods, right-judging, do reserve the task.
But if thou, to thy more than mortal strength

And this great war shall be for many days.
Yet though sweet Peace be as a lustrous star
That dwelleth far, deem I, most mighty chiefs,
That we should gaze on it with earnest eyes,
Acquainting thus our soul with its fair shape ;
For in all things 'tis wise to mark the end.
We also tossed on war's tempestuous surge,
Should know the silver Peace that guides our way,
Even as mariners on the wide deep
Are guided o'er the trackless world of waves,
By the unchanging light of some fixed star.
Therefore, most justly, ere the war begins,
Wise Lygrul looketh cautious unto peace.
Peace let us grant the foe when their swords fail,
But, Arvan, let it not be stained with guile.
Guile is a poison cup which they who fill
For others surely quaff themselves at last.
Who, if thou dost deceive, speaking false words
Before the burning gaze of the bright gods,
Will trust the faith thou hast thyself forsworn.
Weak is a kingdom founded on a lie ;
But truth is loved of the truth-telling stars.
Be then the peace we grant open and just,
So shall the sun-god shield his servants still."

He ceased, and Arvan said, "Chiefs, ye have heard
Irach the Mighty's counsel ; is it good ?"
Then all the chieftains rose with clamorous shout,
Accordant, and with high uplifted hands
In attestation, crying, "It is good."

But Arvan spake again, "The word is good.
Now therefore counsel further for the king ;
How shall we order the land's strength for war."

Then arose Ori, saying, "The land's strength
Lies in her sworded men. Let messengers
Go forth, bearing the king's word, as of old,
Unto the utmost boundaries of the land.
Then let them show the rulers thy commands,
That they shall order all the strong-limbed men
By thousands, and by myriads, arming them
With sword and shield, also with steel-tipped beams,
Ash-wood, even northern spears, feared of the foe.
So let them wait housing in tents of skins
Thy further word, showing the gathering place."

Next Menvohr spoke, "Far over the great plains
Wander the horse-tribes, riders on swift steeds;
Let them be gathered from the plains of grass,
Where they disport them, guarding their white flocks,
Robbing their neighbours. Let thy word go forth,
Showing them war; for they will come with speed,
Lovers of spoil, hearing of pleasant strife,
Even as vultures through the fields of air
Come in dark multitudes from unseen worlds
When the fresh corpses heap a field of death.
Surely, they coming, we may use their spears,
Nor risk our horsemen in the earlier strife.
Thus shall we waste the Western war through deaths,
Drainers of life blood of an armed host;
Nor will the slaughter of these savage men,
They being o'erthrown, affect us, for their flesh
Is even as carrion flesh, of no account;
Nor have they use, save only to be slain."

He ceased. And Ordi rose, prudent of thought:
"Much food," he said, "must be, for that the hosts
Will be exceeding great. They eat up earth,

Even as a man, having outrubbed an ear,
Full ripe, of yellow wheat, in harvest time,
Gathers the gold grains in his hollow palm,
And licks them up with his outstretching lips,
Greedy to eat, nor leaves he one behind.
The lands will not suffice them for their need,
For the man-multitudes are as sea waves
Interminable, nor can men fix their close.
Remember we how many thousands died
In the great war with Ari, lacking food ;
For though they took the last small crumb of bread
From out the peasant woman's starving lips,
And left her and her mate to nourish them
On bark and wretched roots, that beasts refuse,
Yet was there not enough for our array,
But many myriads perished. Therefore now
Let us thus, greatly warned, use prudent thought,
Assembling food, corn, and the herded beasts,
Wine also in the cities of the land,
So that men may not measure all the store,
For that its vastness passes human speech."

Next Kalar spoke : " Our ships in multitudes
Make black the northern ocean, and their sails
Are, as gray clouds that fleck the winter heavens,
Uncounted for their numbers. Shall these wait
Idle in port, or sail mere peaceful seas,
While Arvan and his armed men by land
Toil o'er long leagues, forgetting joys of rest ?
Truly the West land, washed about with waves,
Lies open to our spoilers. Let them speed,
Taking war-weapons in their brawny hands ;
For though unseldom have our mariners

Sailed over sea-paths to the Western land,
Thither have men yet come in black-ribbed barks.
Therefore the path is open. Shall we not,
Wealthy in valiant seamen, o'er the main
Sailing in swarming multitudes of ships,
Assail the western land throughout its coasts ?
This let us do ; for hard it is to fence
A land from the assaults of ocean men,
Seeing in every sea-bay is a breach,
Wherethrough men marching may destroy the foe.
Also the land that watches 'gainst assaults
Continuously, not knowing whence they come,
Is worn out by an ever constant fear.
Men traffic not secure as in old days,
Since sworded spoilers may arise with speed,
Stripping them of their hoards of pleasant gain.
They rest not on their slumber couch secure,
Since they may haply wake ringed round with flame,
Perishing 'neath the sudden swords of foes,
Who out of darkness come forth to destroy ;
Arising from the black lap of the night,
As the fierce levin flashes deadly keen,
Armed with swift might of unexpected death,
Out of the storm-black depths of tempest clouds."

He ceased, and sat him down upon his chair
Awaiting answer, having said his thought.

Then Boro, the gray sea-king, op'd his lips,
And spake a warning word unto his lord ;
For on his black ship in the days of youth
Far had he voyaged, and he knew the deep
Even as a child knoweth his father's face.
"Arvan ! refrain ; decreeing not the attempt,

For dangers manifold averse to life
Guard the wild way unto the western main.
Do I not know it? I! for in the years
When I was strong, fearing not man nor fate,
I with my black ship sought that far off sea.
Then came I, travelling o'er the billowy way,
To the dark ocean, black with many storms,
Which fenceth with tempestuous wrath the west.
Five ships were mine, when from Oroona's quays,
Great city of the northern sea, we sailed,
Then many days over the hoary tide,
Westward we voyaged, coasting shores of sand,
Which buckler from the ocean waves thy realm.
But now when many days had fled, and weeks,
We came beyond the limits of thy realm,
Thy father's realm it was in those far days,
Even beyond its utmost boundary line,
Unto the world whereof is little known
Of northern oversailers of the sea ;
But a wild waste of waves is present there,
Edged by a wild land dreaded of earth's sons.
For prey-beasts overwander it at will,
And savage men, fiercer than beasts of prey.
Thus and thus is it in that far-off land,
Which I in youth have with these dim eyes seen,
Hither when we, borne in the black-ribbed ships,
Swift sailing came, storms, many-clouded, rose,
Striving against us with their windy might,
Beating us all unwilling to the shore.
Awful is that lone shore, edged round with rocks,
That, black-fanged, jutting from the ocean tide,
Bite unawares through the ship's wounded flanks.

There was one bark dashed on the craggy shore,
And all the seamen in the waves engulfed,
Shrieking for aid ungiven of the gods.
Beyond is a large world of clouds and mists,
The Westernmost it is of every land ;
Therethrough do wend all souls that quit our earth,
Sad, glistening multitudes of ghostly shapes ;
Men see them journeying through the steaming fogs,
Over the wild moors to the unknown home ;
And ever as they pass, a wild lament,
Like to the loud-voiced howl of wintry winds,
Falls on the grieved ears of flesh-wearing men.
Such is that spectral land beset with ghosts.
Also its children are a cursèd race ;
Since common mortals, bearing human hearts
Within the caverns of their hairy breasts,
Feeling both pity and the thoughts of love,
Might not endure to dwell on that dire shore.
Therefore the gods created a wild race,
Meet for the land that they should dwell therein ;
Wearing no clothes of woven work nor skins,
But naked of their bodies, overgrown
Even like giant apes with shaggy hair ;
They being like in kind to hair-clad beasts,
Though walking on two feet like sons of men.
Hence are they evil-natured, worse than brutes,
Since in them only the wise gods have made
The strength of reasoning men twinned with brute hearts
Man-eaters are they, feeding even like bears,
Each in his mountain cave upon the slain.
They spare not in their rage the shipwrecked crews
Driven on their coast through stress of adverse winds,

But straight devour them as men eat a goat.
For that they fear not the great gods of heaven,
Nor reverence guest-law, having brutish hearts.
Hence do all mariners avoid that land,
Fearing its fatal customs fraught with death.
But oft-times seek they vainly to avoid
Its hateful coasts set round with ghastly cliffs ;
For the great ocean stream toward its shores
Flows in all strength. The black-ribbed vessels, caught
In its strong, strait embrace are borne along,
Spite of the force of sails, and labouring oars,
Till on the sea-crag dashed with violence,
They bring their journey to an un hoped end.
Such doom comes aye to those who venture nigh
To the grey glimmering cliffs of that ill land.
But unto those, who, warned, on the high main,
Stand far aloof from the death-dealing shore,
Is safety, while the unblest realm of death
Shows on the horizon's edge a dim gray cloud.
Yet who secure over the ocean ways
Travels, heaven-shielded from the rage of storms ?
Then, urged of winds, even the skilled mariner,
Helpless, swift-driven from the destined course,
Within the fell clutch of the briny flood
Is dragged, despairing, to the deadly strand.
There of my four black barks that yet remained,
Three, hugging close th' inhospitable isle,
Were dashed upon its rocks a hapless prey.
Only mine own ship, steered by prudent hands,
Standing aloof, far out upon the main,
Escaped the perils of that land of mist.
But of the wrecked men never one returned

Trusting, would'st yet complete the glorious pile,
Know thou shalt fail. Buildings thus swiftly raised,
Being slight-structured, are aye prone to fall.
Nor do the gods, who build by mortal hands
Kingdoms, regard with greatly favouring eyes
Man's work when it essays to rival theirs.
Where are the kingdoms of the ancient days,—
Govar, and Mor, and Gari, and Yzzand ?
Scarce, in our days, of these a memory
Abideth in the minds of living men.
Lo ! they were great, arising with swift haste,
Even like the shining snow-plant of the mead,
That in a night attains its perfect prime,
Yet doth not long endure. The day wears on,
Its place is empty. As the morning dreams,
That having fled away before the dawn,
Lest she should smite them with her golden rod,
All faintly are remembered ; so their fame,
Once mighty, now is waning from the earth.
Soon shall it be no more. Yet were they great ;
Haply more glorious in their hour than we,
Who are slight children of a later day.
There where they failed, can we achieve success ?
Believe it not, oh ! Arvan ; for the sword
Is as the spade, good for foundation work,
Yet not an instrument wherewith to build.
Nor through its use shall edifice arise
Fit to endure the rude assaults of chance,
Or the slow mining toil of eating Time.
Now, know we well, being thereof assured,
Not lightly shall we win the triumph wreath.
The western hearts are strong, and their swords keen,

And this great war shall be for many days.
Yet though sweet Peace be as a lustrous star
That dwelleth far, deem I, most mighty chiefs,
That we should gaze on it with earnest eyes,
Acquainting thus our soul with its fair shape ;
For in all things 'tis wise to mark the end.
We also tossed on war's tempestuous surge,
Should know the silver Peace that guides our way,
Even as mariners on the wide deep
Are guided o'er the trackless world of waves,
By the unchanging light of some fixed star.
Therefore, most justly, ere the war begins,
Wise Lygrul looketh cautious unto peace.
Peace let us grant the foe when their swords fail,
But, Arvan, let it not be stained with guile.
Guile is a poison cup which they who fill
For others surely quaff themselves at last.
Who, if thou dost deceive, speaking false words
Before the burning gaze of the bright gods,
Will trust the faith thou hast thyself forsworn.
Weak is a kingdom founded on a lie ;
But truth is loved of the truth-telling stars.
Be then the peace we grant open and just,
So shall the sun-god shield his servants still."

He ceased, and Arvan said, "Chiefs, ye have heard
Irach the Mighty's counsel ; is it good ?"
Then all the chieftains rose with clamorous shout,
Accordant, and with high uplifted hands
In attestation, crying, "It is good."

But Arvan spake again, "The word is good.
Now therefore counsel further for the king ;
How shall we order the land's strength for war."

Awaits our presence on the sacred mount:
Therefore the war-assembly hath an end."

Then they arose at Arvan's signal given,
And through the portals passing forth in state,
Deep-thinking, sought the hill of sacrifice.

C A N T O I I I.

THE sun shone in unclouded majesty,
While like a monarch, rich, of lavish heart,
That scatters treasures from exhaustless store
With unrefraining hand, he shed bright wealth
Of heart-rejoicing gold o'er the wide streets,
And stately, many-columned palaces
Of the great city on the banks of Rha,
Where Arvan, darkly-splendid, raised his throne.
A change hath past over that city now,
Blighting its grandeur: lonely are the plains
Where once it sat a queen. There shepherds watch
Their fleecy charge, calm tenders of the flocks,
Guarding from midnight robbers and the assaults
Of savage beasts their fear-filled multitudes,
That over-wander all the grass-clad plain.
Rough is the plain, embossed with emerald mounds,
That show to gazing eyes like tiny hills,
Which the all-mother, Earth, in sportive hour,
Had shaped, in mockery of her giant sons,
White Mountain, Arison, or awful Ur.
At intervals, stretched like a stony belt
Across the billowy, sea-like solitudes,
Lie league-long avenues of shattered stones,
All that remains of granite obelisk,
Or columned marbled pride. And peasants' eyes,

Unskilled to read what was, from what is now,
See not, as dull they urge their daily task
'Mid the bleak stones upon the silent hills,
Grass-clad, that multitudinous stud the plain,
That the time-wasted realm that sleeps below
Was mightiest once of all seen of the sun.
Yet Arvan's royal city, though its site
Is now scarce known of men, once, in its pride,
Shone gem-like on the royal robe of earth.
Stateliest she was of cities in old days,
Vast as great Oum, when, crowned with all command,
She sat a queen upon the Irar plains,
Spreading her robes imperial o'er the land,
From sea-laved Gurna to the Aror hills.
Broad were her streets, that to the horizon stretched,
Fenced in with palace huge or humbler home,
Fashioned of sun-dried brick. Temples were there,
Mountain-like, marble-cased, homes of the gods;
For every star-god had a separate fane,
And on a thousand altars duly smoked,
When the night fell, a worthy sacrifice.
But of all temples that above men's homes.
Towered, their fair foreheads bathed in yellow light,
Was the Sun's shrine, most gloriously fair.
Facing the palace of the king, it rose!
Its pinnacles steep in the thin blue air.
The cunning work which vested all the fane
Hidden in distance, mocked the earnest gaze
Of keenest eyes, uplooking from below.
And all the walls were clad with precious stones,
Jasper, and agate, chalcedony, jade;
And every column wore a robe of light

Bright as the hues flung by the diamond stone,
When on its facets flash the sunny rays :
Thus glorious was that majestic fane.

Forming the third side of the sacred square,
Facing the sun-street, whose magnificent breadth
Belted from side to side the royal town,
Stretching away to the horizon's edge,
Linking the royal palace and the shrine,
Whose huge opposed bulk hemmed in the plain,
Stood the green sacred hill of sacrifice.
Gigantic as a nature-built hill,
Though framed by toil of many myriad hands,
The grass-clad mount lifted its head to heaven.
A giant mass, it stretched from side to side ;
One angle close against the palace wall,
The other touching the sun's glowing fane.
Thus stood stern lowering in portentous strength
The sacrificial hill, high raised to heaven,
Crowned with the holy altar of the sun,
Hiding the blue horizon from men's eyes.

Low at its feet, glistening in sunny light,
Was a broad granite basin, sea-like, vast,
Filled even to the brim with water clear,
Wherein men duly washed the sacrifice
Ere it was offered on the sacred mount,
For they would give clean victims to the gods.
Up the steep mountain's green grass-vestured slopes,
Even from the margin of the sacred sea,
Rose the long flight of granite steps that led
To where upon the green hill's flattened crest
The sun's black altar gazed upon the sky.
Broad was the altar, strong as is a tower,

Formed to defy the march of armed hosts,
Yet rude the fire-scorched, uncemented mass,
Built of black rocks, gathered from mountain peaks,
Whose jagged summits piercing the blue heavens
First saw the rising, last the setting sun.
These had men gathered from the distant lands,
Knowing such rocks were surely loved of him
Who smiled upon them, chiefest of earth's things.
Such was the mountain-altar of the sun.

And ever after his triumphant wars
On the black, blood-stained altar of the sun,
Since 'twas the custom of that northern land,
King Arvan offered up in sacrifice
The chiefest of the captives ta'en in war.
And this men did, well knowing that the sun
Looks not unwilling on the ruddy stream
That flows from warrior men, princes, and kings,
In that where'er he shines it crimson earth ;
Therefore they prudent strove his thirst to slake
With the red life-wine that he gladly quaffed,
Deeming that, sated well with captive blood,
His wrath would spare the children of the land.

Now on this day the sun-priest had prepared,
So Arvan bade, a worthy sacrifice.
On the black altar, in due order ranged,
Branchless and cleft, the pine tree stems were laid,
Waiting the holy fire, whose sacred flame,
Brought from the deep recesses of the fane,
Where bright it burnt, unseen of vulgar eyes,
Should kindle them into exultant life.
And all around the altar watched the priests,
Black-garbed, long-haired, with stern and awful eyes ;

And by the margin of the sacred sea
They stood, close-gathered like a raven cloud
That hungry settles on a battle-field,
Seeking their joyful feast on slaughtered men :
For Arvan's train on his triumphant march,
Even now was drawing near the sacred square.

He came, preceded by a long array
Of weaponed warriors, whose swift-smiting swords
Had won success and beaten down the foe.
Each in his strong right hand a pine-branch bore ;
For the dark tree that scorneth heat and cold,
Was in that northern land emblem of strength.
First marched a host of quiver-bearing men ;
Their left hand bore the branch ; their right the bow,
These although now subject to Arvan's sway,
Once stood in war against him ; but his sword
Had overthrown their leaders, and their land,
Chained by his might, now bled even as he willed.
Saru the son of Naum led them in war,
Well-skilled to govern arrow-shooting men,
And now in peace ruling their warrior lines.

Them followed close, a brass-clad multitude ;
Brazen their helms, their breasts were mailed in brass,
And brazen greaves shone on their well-fenced legs.
With unsheathed glistening swords they forward went,
As a great yellow snake steals through the waste.
Khala, the son of Garach, was their chief,
Swift biter with the sword, valiant in fight :
Of him 'twas graven on the record stones,
That on a day he, lapped in gentle sleep,
Sweeter than purest oil to weary limbs,
Sudden was set on by the wary foe,

Who from their lurking place, five score and twelve,
All shield-uplifting men, stormed sudden forth,
Hoping to take him captive where he lay :
But he, aroused from sleep, tossed his long hair,
Even as a lion shakes his angry mane ;
Then, for there was scant time to draw the glaive,
Seeing his foes assailed him unawares,
Swordless by might of his unweaponed hand,
He beat, as with a war-club to the ground,
The warrior twain, who led that sudden charge ;
So gave a great shout, drawing his brown blade,
Wherewith he smote to earth one score and four ;
But the rest panic-stricken, fled like hares
When the grim hound assails their fear-filled tribes,
Such, and so great was Khala, Garach's son,
Marshalling now in peace manslaying men.

When the last line of warriors brazen-armed
Had past like a great wave upon the sea,
That swiftly moveth flashing yellow light,
On to the wide-spread ocean's grizzled shore.
A mixed multitude of men drew nigh,
Savage they looked, fierce-eyed, with unkempt hair,
Loose from their shoulders hung the hides of beasts,
Tiger, and spotted pard, and furry bear,
Slain in the chase. Their naked sun-tanned limbs
Showed like to panthers' swarthy-hued and vast.
These were mace-wielders whom the distant plains
Of Northern Ari bore, mother of men.
Cruel they were in fight, shedders of blood ;
Cruel they were e'en when the fight was won,
Unsparing to the lands they had subdued,
Seeing they listened not to human cries,

Nor heeded human tears, nor feared the stars.
Vain was the mother's crying for her child ;
Vainly girl-children, their sweet eyes o'erflowed
With supplicating tears, entreated grace.
More cruel were they than all beasts of prey,
Tiger, or mountain bear, or spotted pard,
Wild boar, or lion prowler of the wild.
Oft had their clubs, unsparing in the war,
Smitten unheeding women's bare breasts.
Oft had their maces beaten out the brains
Of wounded men ; often, with joined hands,
Weaponless men had prayed to them for grace,
Whose souls could never hear sweet mercy's prayer,
They being earless as their great lord Death :
For these were of all tribes that lived on earth,
The only men who worshipped Death as God.
And him they served, knowing well his might :
For said they, " He is strongest lord of all ;
Stronger than lust, for he destroyeth lust ;
Stronger than life, since that he quencheth life :
Therefore they worshipped him with hideous rites,
And shaped in stone eterne his image vast,
That now stands ghastly on the eastern plains,
Behind the altar black with human blood.
Earless it is, for the skin-wearers said,
" Earless is Death ; he hears no mortal prayer.
We too, his children, should have earless hearts,
For that the servants should be like their lord."
Wild stormed through the Rha city's throngèd streets,
Cruel and fierce, that untamed multitude ;
And wheresoe'er they past, although long years
They had been ranged beneath king Arvan's sway,

Shedding their blood to serve the northern land,
Women shrank back as though they feared a wrong ;
And little children, their affrighted eyes
Buried, fear-stricken, in their mother's robes,
As though a host of beasts of prey went by.
So terrible showed those barbarian hordes ;
Nardon, the son of Darh, slayer of men,
Wielding his iron club, ruled the long lines.

Lo ! when all these had past, an iron gleam
Filled the great sun-street through its breadth of way.
Down-flowing dark came the great stream of men ;
An inky light it flung upon the eye
From helmèd heads and orbèd iron shields,
As a black river rippled by east wind,
And overarched by sullen tempest-clouds,
Reflects a gloom of frowns as it flows by.
These were King Arvan's chosen, Northmen all,
Bravest of men on whom the sun looked down.
A myriad pine-boughs shadowed the dark ranks,
A myriad falchions in their strong right hands
Flashed back on gazing eyes the light of Heaven.
While that they past, the people's tongues were mute,
They wondering greatly at that brave array.
These were the flower of all the North-land's hosts.
Irach, the Chief, ruled o'er their ranks in fight.

Them followed the war-chariots, iron-wheeled,
Scythe-studded, drawn by fiery-hearted steeds,
Swift renders in the fight of limbs of men :
A thousand chariots were there, rulèd in fight
By chosen warriors. Whereso'er they past,
The earth shook with the trampling of the steeds,
While the dread rattle of the iron wheels

Filled like an earth-born thunder all the plain.
Two chieftains in each scythèd chariot stood :
One, hurler of the javelin, swift to smite,
One, ruler of the war-steeds in the strife.

The last war-chariot, thundering on its way,
Still shook the earth beneath its iron wheels,
When Arvan's guard drew on ; golden their helms,
And all their breastplates were of burnished gold.
White were their chargers, white as the sea-foam,
That, when the storm-wind smites the watery plain,
Lies in long pearly wreaths along the sand ;
Fair were they, as the white steeds of the moon,
That draw his argent chariot-throne through heaven ;
Pink-nostrilled, and with delicatest limbs,
That quivered greatly with excess of life ;
And when, offended by the silver bit,
They tossed their heads on high, the foam-flakes flew,
Like snow-drift, driven, upon a stormy day,
Over the wild hills by the Northern wind.
Lygrul, the son of Cardol, led their ranks.

Lo ! when all these had passed, Arvan drew near
Upon his royal chariot bright with gold,
Fashioned of wild-beast tusks, burning with gems.
High o'er men's heads towered his imperial form ;
And as he past, a great shout rent the air,
Whilst even the boldest stooped his face to earth,
Fearing to gaze upon the mighty king,
Lord of the fateful sword. Behind his car
A wretched train of miserable men,
Naked, with tight-bound arms, the captives came.
They shivered as they went, chilled with the breath
Of the cold wind that blows from Death's dark wave,

To whose black marge each step brought them more near,
For they would soon be offered to the god.

Alone among the band the Southern king
Yet held his forehead high, as though he scorned,
Crushed though he was, to yield him up to Fate.
Stately he seemed, though fallen from high place ;
Crowned with his own great nobleness he moved,
And though undiademed, showed yet a king.

Last of the long procession, a black swarm
Of swarthy horsemen, reining fiery steeds,
That 'neath the quickening spur curvetted fierce,
Filled all the way, and closed the martial line ;
Horsemen uncounted, each one prompt in arms,
Armed with long lance, and plaited osier shield.

All these the Sunsquare gathered in its lap,
Rangèd in order meet, soon as they came,
Even as the death-land, mighty to devour,
Receives the marching multitude of souls,
That through the grave seeketh the unknown shore.
When they had past, the outspread, gazing crowd
Of many thousands, gathered close behind,
With a great voice of talking (for their eyes
Gazed, being human, gladly upon death,
And their hearts yearned to see the sacrifice).

Now did the many-nationed warrior hosts
Stand rangèd round the square ; and the black priests,
Awaiting by the granite-girdled wave,
Received the victims from King Arvan's hand.
But Arvan turned his glowing chariot-wheels,
Urging his steeds over the stony plain,
Till by the Temple of the Sun he paused ;
Then he descended. Thrice unto the earth

He stooped his brow, soiling it with the dust ;
After, with discrowned head, in suppliant guise,
He climbed the broad steps of the holy fane,
And crièd with a voice exceeding loud :
“ Priest of the mighty Sun, beloved of Heaven,
Sidroc, who dwellest by the sacred fire,
Hearken with ready ears : Arvan is here ;
And lo ! he brings a worthy sacrifice.”

Thereon the doors flew open with a clang,
That echoed awful o’er the shuddering plain,
And the High Priest came from the inmost shrine.
High in his hands he bore the brazen dish,
Bright with the ardent coals of sacred fire,
That is, alone upon the soiled earth,
Meet to awaken flames of sacrifice.
Bald as a vulture’s was the seer-priest’s head,
And greedy as a vulture’s were his eyes,
Fierce with the fire that long years cannot tame ;
And all his reverent beard, silvered with age,
Below the grey, stern face hung stainless white,
As, ’neath the wild Ur mountain’s topmost peak,
The pallid snows stretch down the barren sides.
Still wheresoe’er he went an hundred priests
Followed his steps, obedient to his word.
Upon the topmost step, before the fane,
Sidroc the priest stood facing the great king,
Answering to him with slow and quiet words.
“ Arvan ! the god hath heard a crying voice ;
Yea, it hath reached him, coming to his ears,
Where on his throne he sittèth, Lord of Heaven.
Know, he doth look upon the sacrifice,
And therefore am I come forth from the shrine,

Where he hath looked on me, speaking a word ;
Behold I bear coals of the sacred fire."
When the High Priest's words failed from out the air,
Myriads of voices gave a sudden shout,
Crying, "The Sun doth see the sacrifice."
But the black priests, beside the stone-girt sea,
Soon as they saw the temple-doors stood ope,
And that the god propitious lent his smile
To Arvan, sending forth the sacred fire,
Seized on the unwilling victims, where they stood,
Naked and bound, shrinking from coming death,
And plunged them in the basin's hallowed wave.
There washed from off their limbs the dust and sweat,
Making them clean, pure victims for the god.
But Arvan, with the high priest and his band,
Crossed slowly over to the basin's edge,
And waited till the victims, duly washed,
Stood by the margin with fair glistening limbs,
White-shining, clean,—a fitting sacrifice.
Then up the grey steps of the sacred mound
The dark, slow, undulating train of men,
Striped by the white-limbed victims' helpless band,
Crawled like a caterpillar, slowly on,
Striving towards the summit of the hill.
Thither arrived, they gathered in a crowd,
Close ranged round the dark-hued slaughter-stone.
But Arvan stood, facing the multitude,
Crownless his head, and in his strong right hand
Gleamed the broad-bladed sacrificial steel.
Then cried he, stretching the sword on high,
"Let us arise and offer sacrifice
Unto the mighty Sun who rules above,

For the great god hath given us victory."
There with a sudden flash the falchion sank,
And all the people, when they saw it sink,
With loud consentient voice responsive cried,
"Let us arise, and offer sacrifice,
For the great Sun hath given us victory."

Then Arvan spake, "Kings, princes, warrior-men;
And you, oh peoples! listening submiss,
The great Sun claimeth praise, brightest of gods.
Lord is he of the heaven, and lord of earth.
Therefore let all who stand before the mount
Sing the loud sun-chant, honouring the god."

He ceased; the priests awoke the sacred strain,
While all the people echoed it below.
A myriad voices swelled the deep-voiced roar;
To him who stood upon the sacred hill,
It sounded, as the deep voice of the sea
Sounds unto him who high on ocean's cliff
Looks down upon the multitude of waves.
"Praised be the Sun. He sits white-robed in flame.
He sitteth high upon his golden throne.
He sits on high. He ruleth gods and men.
For the bright Sun, he is the lord of all.

The flowers of earth lift up their crownèd heads;
They lift their heads and look upon his face;
They lift their heads, rejoicing in his rays;
For the bright Sun, he is the lord of all.

The green-robed trees stretch forth their sinewy arms;
They stretch their arms on high in silent praise;
They praise the Sun, giver of light and life;
For the bright Sun, he is the lord of all.

The birds of heaven awaken from their rest;

They spread their soft wings in the sunny beam ;
They spread their wings and chant the hymn of joy ;
For the bright Sun, he is the lord of all.

The beasts of earth lift up their patient eyes ;
They lift their eyes and utter deep-voiced words ;
They cry to him, giver of light and food,
For the bright Sun ; he is the lord of all.

The nations rise and bow them to the earth ;
They bow them to the earth ; they wake the chant ;
They praise the god, giver of light and joy ;
For the bright Sun ; he is the lord of all.

The ragged mountains raise their awful heads ;
They raise their heads and gaze upon his face ;
They raise their heads rejoicing in his beams ;
For the bright Sun ; he is the lord of all.

The cloud kings seated high on empty air,
The cloud kings sit and watch to see his ray ;
They see his ray ; they glow fulfilled with fire ;
For the bright Sun ; he is the lord of all.

The star-gods at his shining quit their thrones,
They lay their golden sceptres at his feet—
They lay their sceptres down ; they pass away ;
For the bright Sun ; he is the lord of all.

Praise ye the Sun ; for he is lord of earth.
Praise ye the Sun ; for he is lord of heaven.
Men and the gods are subject unto him.
Praise ye him therefore—he is lord of all.”

There the chant paused, and all the tumult died,
While a deep voiceless calm oppressed the air—
It was a calm like that of sultry day,
When the whole heaven is black with tempest clouds,
Ere the white bolt of heaven destroying falls ;

And in the silence, when the praise-hymn died,
And the deep thunder failed from out the air,
Arvan the warrior-king turned slowly round,
And to the southern monarch coldly said,
“Thine hours are filled ; therefore prepare to die.”
Then looked the captive king on Arvan’s face
With brave untroubled eyes that feared not death,
And, answering, spake to him a warning word,
“Oh ! Arvan, slaughterer of many men,
Dost thou not fear the vengeance of the gods,
That, slowly journeying, walketh o’er the earth,
Judging the sons of men, repaying wrong.
Thou who dost bow before the bright-faced god,
And reverence night’s golden-sceptred ones,—
Dost thou not dread the splendour of the sun,
Nor fear the patient shining of the stars ?
I am a captive, and my hands are bound,
And thou, the conqueror, must work thy will,
Yet the gods’ eyes are on thee.” Cold the king
Answered, “They wait to see the sacrifice.”

Then the Sun’s priests laid hold on the South king,
And flung him bound on the black slaughter-stone.
But Arvan whirled high through the shrinking air,
That parted wailing where the falchion past,
The sacrificial sword. Flashing it fell,
Cleaving the South king’s breast, piercing the heart.
Then the priests took the corpse with ready hands,
And laid it, trembling yet with parting life,
Upon the massive altar of the Sun,
Offering it up unto the shining god.
But after this, two score and nineteen men,
All chosen captives, prisoners ta’en in war,

Were done to death on the black slaughter-stone;
For that the Sun claimed a full gift of men.
And Arvan stood, while they were offered up,
Watching their pangs with cold, indifferent eyes;
For he had gazed so oft on mortal woe,
And been acquaint so long with deeds of blood,
That his heart was within him as a stone.

Now when all these were slain, the black-robed priests
Laid by the body of the southern king
Five other victims, chiefest of the slain,
Each one a prince, leader of many men,
Upon the mighty pile of cloven wood,
Upheaped on the black altar of the Sun.
But all the rest, being of lesser note,
Were borne adown the steps, a horrid train,
By the broad-shouldered servants of the sun.
Then upon twenty mountainous pyres of pine,
That at due intervals, studded the plain,
Fulfilled with fiery juice, eager to burn,
They placed the corpses of the meaner slain.
Afterwards came they all, being five score,
All the Sun's servants, venerable priests,
And knelt full low before the holy mount,
Soiling their reverent foreheads in the dust,
Adoring him who rules the azure fields.

This the High Priest, the old man, when he saw,
He held aloft the consecrated dish,
Brazen that held the coals of sacred fire,
Entreating rightly the majestic Sun
To look upon the precious sacrifice.
Then kindled he the wood with holy flame;
And first the fire burned low; but soon it rose,

Fierce ravening for the wood, and flesh of men.
High in the air it lifted tawny arms,
Praying the Sun to bless his children still.
But the High Priest and Arvan, ere the flame
Rose to its strength, slowly with solemn march,
Descended to the plain. The serving priests
Arose from earth, forming the lengthened line.
Then, headed by the High Priest and the king,
To every pyre the dark procession moved,
Waking within their breasts the life of fire.
High rose the flames, like fiery-crested snakes
Tossing their heads above the vanquished foes,
Whose death-pale corpses, soiled with ruddy blood
Were unto them even as pleasant meat.
And as they rose the adoring multitude
Prostrate on earth worshipped the mighty Sun,
Shouting with one great voice, "The Sun is God."
Whilst o'er the prostrate thousands, o'er the ranks
Of sworded men, over the holy fane,
O'er the bright palace, dwelling of the king,
And o'er the royal city's farthest homes,
Rolled the dark clouds funereal, black as night,
Wrapping the wide earth in a shroud of gloom.

C A N T O I V.

THE sacrifice was o'er. The victims' blood
Showed black and clotted 'neath the silver Moon,
Who now, girt by the star-gods, ruled in heaven ;
Great God of death, white herald of the months,
That, slowly circling, build the perfect year,
Lover of men, averse to misery,
That meeteth weary mortals on life's way,
Is he ; therefore he sendeth sleep and death,
Dispensing either gift with lavish hand ;
For that he gladly giveth easeful rest.
Thence doth he, silver-sceptred, mount his throne
Of thrice-bleached ivory, when holy night
With dew-wet hands hath cooled the hearts of men,
And wrought in them great longings after peace.
Now did he oversilver all the roofs
Uncounted of the city of the Rha ;
And glanced from Arvan's marble palace-walls,
And flung white fire-flakes on the tossing waves,
That broke full softly on its sea-ward face,
Where the great stream strove ever with the main.
But in the inner darkness Arvan sat :
Within his palace-hall, girt round with gloom ;
A mighty hall, panelled with cedarn wood,
And painted o'er with curious coloured work,

He sat, and gazed on the moon's gracious face,
Peacegiver, much beloved of mortal men.
But the king's soul rebelled against his sway,
Nor could the god shed rest upon his brow ;
For a dark spirit from the nether shades,
Where, by the grave-king's throne of sooty gloom,
Base spirits sit, and gibber girt with night,
Had been sent forth to vex king Arvan's heart.
Restless he sat upon his golden chair,
Hung with the yellow lion's tawny hide,
And ate his heart in anxious solitude ;
For all his soul was overgloomed with doubt,
And much his mind misgave him, that the war
Planned of his soul against the populous West,
Would not be for his honour. Then he thought,
Sadly within himself, " Have I returned
Victorious from so many bloody fields ;
And must I fall ignobly at the last."
There as the sad thought crossed him he would eye
The diamond hilt of the triumphant sword,
As if to reassure his wavering heart.
But as he gazed, yet deeper grew the night,
Ebon, unblest, that girdled in his soul,
For when its clear light met his troubled gaze
A threatening word rang ever in his ear,
" The demon's gift is as a hiltless sword."
Then would he murmur over in his heart,
" Hath it stood by me in so many fields,
And must it wound its master's hand at last."
At length, outworn with wrestling down his grief,
He rose and stamped, and to the slave who came
Obedient to his call, he cried aloud,

“ Bid Chavah that she come unto the king,
And let her bring with her the chorded wood.”
So went the slave upon his silent way,
But bowèd first in reverence to his lord,
Then sought out Chavah where she sat alone,
Far from the women, toiling with her hands,
And showed her all the message of the king,
And how that she should bring the chorded wood.

Now Arvan had of wives threescore and five,
Fairest of all the daughters of the earth,
Stately and beautiful as cedar trees—
But Chavah was most beauteous of them all.
Her had he taken captive in the war
When he o’ercame the monarchs of the East ;
Lovelier she was than is a night of stars ;
Daughter of Esthli, monarch of the waste,
Who from far lands led forth his twinkling spears,
Innumerable as the waving reeds
That fringe the dark Rha’s sullen lengths of shore.
And Arvan hated Esthli, for he heard
That, ere he went to war, the eastern king
Had sworn an oath before the sacred fire,
Speaking a sure word, that his sword should slay
Arvan, king of the North, and at the wheels
Of his war chariot, through the throngèd streets
Of his own royal city drag the corpse,
Fast bound unto the car with iron chains.
So, when the eastern kings with hosts arrayed
Upon the plains met Arvan face to face,
And were discomfited, Esthli was ta’en
Grievously smitten, yet not struck to death.
But Esthli’s tent of hides became a prey,

And all his robes woven from wool of sheep,
And all his heavy bowls of burning gold,
And his fair crown and sceptre bright with gems,
And Chavah, too, was taken in the tent.
But when king Arvan saw her naked face,
His heart clave to her for her beauty's sake,
Yet hating her, for she was Esthli's child.
So when he turned in great triumph home
He took the captive Chavah unto wife,
But offered Esthli up a sacrifice
Unto the sun-god. Yet he kept the head,
And from the white skull was a goblet made,
Glistening as ivory, clasped round with gold ;
Whilst Arvan at his war-feasts drained the cup,
Memorial of his fulfilled revenge.

Now on a night, the king, merry with wine,
(He was aye cruel when his heart was glad),
Cried to the slaves who waited on their lord,
"Call Chavah forth to me : the eastern slave."
And Chavah, summoned, came. Her stately grace—
For she was beautiful as a fair shrine
Of stainless alabaster, free from soil,
Clothed in a burning garb of sunset red—
Awed those rough warrior-men who scorned the sword ;
And as she entered a low murmur ran
Round all the hall, issuing from bearded lips ;
For men forgot the presence of the king
When Chavah like a moonbeam lit the hall,
Such was the might of her great loveliness.
O'er her fair shoulders, cloked in ruddy cloth,
Her black hair unrestrained hung to the ground,
Tasselled with many plates of burning gold,

That as she moved gave a sweet clanking sound,
Musical with the motion of her steps.
Calm was her lovely face, yet sorrowful
With the great sadness of her sire's defeat
And bitter death. There was no man that looked
Upon her, standing there within the hall,
But felt for her pity, and pain of heart.
Arvan alone gazed on her grief unmoved,
For long success had dried sweet Mercy's springs,
And parched his soul into a desert land.
Now also he was fiercer than his wont,
Seeing his heart was lifted up with wine,
And hot with wrath for the remembered oath
Which the dead king, Esthli, her father swore :
So lifting up on high the ghastly bowl,
He handed it to Chavah, saying, "Drink!"
And Chavah drank, obedient. Then he said,
"The wine, oh! Chavah, doth it please thee well."
"Well, my lord king," said Chavah. Arvan laughed,
A bitter laugh of scorn, and mocking said,
"Haply thou lik'st the flavour of the bowl :
Know thou hast drunk from out thy father's skull."
Then the black blood boiled hotly at his heart,
So hating her, he cried, "Get thee away."
And Chavah swooned not, but grew very pale ;
For that great wrong was bitter to her soul ;
And though she hid her heart from Arvan's gaze,
Yet when she sat and communed with herself,
Of her past life, and that deep injury,
From that day forth she smiled an evil smile,
Seeing she hated Arvan in her heart.
So Chavah's sweet life by that wrong was changed,

As is that stream sweet-flowing of the North,
Into whose waves the black and bitter tide,
Poured by another water soiling falls,
And poisons all the flood for evermore.
Therefore, although with women at the task
She sat, seeming industrious as of old,
Weaving with nimble fingers cunning work ;
And though she mingled, at high festival,
With chiefs and princes, smiling sunny smiles,
She looked on Arvan with a sleepless hate,
Deep plotting deathful plots against his life.

But Arvan feared nought less than treachery
From her, whose heart was masked with gentleness ;
For, blinded by her beauty's matchless light,
And by her winning speech and gentle ways,
He came with days, forgetting Esthli's oath
To lean upon the love of Esthli's child.
And she, who had been taught in days of old,—
When she, a princess, dwelt in the East land,—
To waken restful music from the strings,
Had power, above all women in the hall,
To calm King Arvan with the voice of song.

So Chavah came to him, and in her hand
She bore the chorded wood, giver of peace.
King Arvan, as she entered, looked not up,
Deep brooding in his heart o'er grievous thoughts ;
And she, so light her tread, stole through the hall,
Standing beside him ere he was aware ;
Then bending low before him meekly spoke :
"Thou sentest, King, for Chavah ; she is here."
To her, slow answering, Arvan replied :
"Chavah ! my heart is overgloomed with night,

And a great horror girdles in my life ;
Therefore I sent for thee, that thou should'st come ;
Awake thou then for me the chorded wood."

Then Chavah sat her down, low at his feet,
Making soft music with her instrument ;
Adding thereto the calm voice of a song.
" Sweet is the south wind, blown from spicy fields,
To outworn slaves who rest, their labours done.
Sweet is the rose's odour-laden breath.
Sweeter than these, than aught of earth, is love.

Sweet is the fresh spring in the sandy waste,
To parchèd wanderer's lips, failing for thirst.
Sweet is the honey dripping from the rock.
Sweeter than these, than aught of earth, is love.

Sweet is the sight of land to shipwrecked eyes,
After long days of watching on the main.
Sweet is the light of home to 'wilderer men.
Sweeter than these, than aught of earth, is love.

Sweet love be with us in the hours of life ;
Sweet love be with us in the hours of death ;
Sweet love be with us in the nether world ;
Rest of the earth art thou, alone, oh love !"

There Chavah stayed her hand, and her voice paused,
Whilst for some minutes in the moonlit hall
There was deep silence ; for King Arvan sat
Silent as is a statue hewn in stone.
And Chavah nestled voiceless at his side,
Leaning her black-tressed head against his knee,
And gazing up into his gloomy face,
With great eyes kindled in the moon's white light,
Till they gleamed lustrous as an ocean wave
Filled with sea-lightning. At the last the king

Spake sadly once again : " Chavah—the queen—
What thinkest thou of Athreh ?" Chavah said :
" I think she loved thee, and she loves thee not.
Thou know'st it, Arvan ; oft told I it thee.
Nor do I blame her greatly for this thing,
For once thou madest all thy love her own.
Now a great change hath come upon thy mind,
And thou dost smile on others. She sits lone,
A queen discrownèd of her olden joy.
How should she love thee, Arvan ? By my life,
Were I as she is I would hate thee sore."
" Yea ! my fair queen," said Arvan ; " sayest thou true ?
Yet thou who sayest it hatest me not ;
Thou dwelling, not alone, queen in these halls."
" Thou hast not wronged me as thou wrongèd'st her.
Grey was thy hair ; thy soul's love had been given,
Ere my life's star arose upon thy sky.
To me thou gavest all thou had'st to give,
Freedom from chains, thy friendship, and a throne ;
More than all these, the right to love thee well ;—
And that is much. Oh, Arvan ! other worlds,
Reached through the shadowy pathway of the grave,
May boast of greater riches. Earth hath naught
So precious as the right to love thee well."

Then on her two hands, clasped above his knee,
She stooped her beautiful forehead and was still.
And Arvan thought upon fair Chavah's words,
Believing that her specious tale was true.
But Chavah lied unto him ; knowing well
That Athreh of all women loved him best.

Now this the hidden reason of the lie,
That flowed fair-seeming from her truthless tongue,

Slaying the sweet life of Queen Athreh's love ;
Chavah, the beauteous, sought Queen Athreh's life,
Deeming she stood 'twixt her and her revenge.
"For," said she, "Athreh loves him surely well ;
And if she loveth, will detect my guile ;
Since though a tyrant's soul is lightly lulled,
Yet never was there treachery on earth
So godlike, compassed in its night of strength,
But the keen eyes of love pierced through the gloom ;
Therefore must Athreh die. And it were well
That he should slay her ; since if fair success
Smileth her sweet smile, guerdoning my pain,
Haply my tongue may show him all the truth.
Then will the thought be bitter to his heart
That he hath quenched her life, who loved him well,
To pleasure her who hates him." And this dream
Of honeyed vengeance much refreshed her soul,
So that the bloom came back into her cheeks,
And the sweet light waxed stronger in her eyes ;
Till all men, who beheld her, where she stood,
Spake to each other, saying, "Is she fair ?"
And they would answer, "Chavah is most fair
Of all who wear on earth a woman's name."

But Arvan dwelt on Chavah's venomous words
That she had spoken ; whilst a silence fell
Between her soul and his ; for, sad at heart,
He brooded o'er ill thoughts which she had laid
Within his mind, kindling them to ill deed.
So broods a bird unknowing on the egg
Laid by the robber-bird within its nest,
Waking the life that shall lay waste its home.
Slow, as he thought, unblest suspicions came,

That Chavah had instilled in earlier hours ;
But that to-night, gifted with tenfold force,
In legioned strength assailed his wavering love.
Slow they assembled, indistinct in shape,
Like the small films that build the tempest-clouds,
Each weightless, slight, that even an infant's hands
Avail to scatter ; but with linked strength
Of darkness, mighty to o'erspread the sky,
And quench the fair light of the glorious sun.

At last King Arvan oped his mouth again :
"Chavah," he said, "I deem that thou art true,
And that thou lovest Arvan. Tell me now—
For a king's life is sought of many foes—
Hast thou seen aught in Athreh that reveals
Hatred life-menacing?" And Chavah said,
"Oh, Arvan! Athreh is a mighty queen,
And I as nothing. Should I speak a word,
Haply ere through the portals of thine ears
The sound had entered, travelling to thy soul,
Thou wouldst repent thee. So were my words lost,
And I should seem a liar in thy sight ;
Yea, and perchance should also lose thy love—
And that I would not." Then she raised her head,
Looking on him with an all-tender smile,
That, rippling, overspread her lovely face
With dimpling light. Ah! not more pure and bright
Rise the clear-dimpled waters of a spring,
Holy with moonlight, when it riseth up
Out of the earth's heart to rejoice the world,
Parched by the fierce heat of the feverish day.

And Arvan gazed upon her gracious smile
Till he believed its witness. Fool of heart!

Unknowing that such smiles, on women's cheeks,
Are sometimes only as the lovely light
That beautifies corruption. Then he said,
Trusting her, "Chavah ! Arvan needs a friend.
Unsurely stablished is a kingly throne,
Built on foundations treacherous as the ice,
Wherewith bleak Winter roofs the northern sea ;
Safe only till temptation's summer sun
Smiles on the clear-ribbed adamantine mass,
Changing its sure strength to unsolid waves.
Yea, and my heart misgives me, lest my might
And all undimmed success have stolen away
Hearts that had else been loyal. Man forgives
Scarce to his fellow, be he who he may,
If he, a mortal, know not mortal ill.
Triumph and Envy were even at one birth
Born by the all-prolific womb of Time.
Twins are they, hand in hand over the earth
Wandering through after-hours. The one is mine,
With me through all the hours of earthly life ;
Nor can I shun the other. Sisters they :
One loved, the other loathed. Who weds the loved,
Must also take the hated. I stand lone,
Sundered by triumph from my fellow-men ;
As the brave eagle, rising to the sun,
Even by his peerless might of wingèd strength,
Is severed from the lesser fowls of earth.
Chavah ! the gold crown on the kingly brow
Is not all weightless. The right-judging gods
Weave diversely the fates of mortal men ;
But to no child of earth they grant to wear
Their own robe of immortal happiness.

Chavah ! thou art a captive ; I am king :
Haply thou thinkest mine the brighter fate.
Know that there is no slave in all the land,
Who, if he knew the sadness of my heart,
Would be as Arvan is. No trust have I
In loyalty, in faith, in friendly smile,
Nor in the tight clasp of the greeting hand,
Nor in fair words that promise truth and love ;
But for thy love, I were alone on earth.
But in thy truth I trust ; for I have proved
Its strength, and surely know it for mine own."

And Chavah spake : "Arvan ! I love thee well.
But love like mine speaketh in deeds, not words ;
Yet know, if need were, I would fling my soul
Right gladly into death's unfathomed gulf,
Might I by such a loss make sure thy bliss.
Oh ! Arvan, wise, keen-sighted as thou art,
Thou see'st not all the might of woman's love :
Profounder is it than the ocean-stream.
Thought, the strong diver, from its depths profound
Returneth baffled, reaching nowhere land.
Higher it is than the blue vault of heaven,
On whose far summit sit the burning stars,
Each on his golden throne. The strongest wing
Tires ere it doth attain to their bright feet.
Exalted thus o'er the base, grovelling earth,
Star-bright shines woman's love. No dream of man
Hath sinewed might to wing its way so high.
And I, how can I show thee all the love
That lies within my soul, deep-hidden there,
As Orient pearls beneath the briny sea ?
Yet, Arvan, for the warm heart fain would speak,

Even though with faltering accents, to the loved
Words that may partly draw the veil aside,
Know, that to save thee I would face all pain.
Yea, I would fence thy heart with mine own breast,
Throwing down life like an unvalued robe,
To make more smooth the pathway of thy feet."
"Oh! crown of women! fairest of thy race,
And virtuous as fair, thou sayest truth.
I know it—I; and therefore trust I thee.
Have I not had fair witness of thy love?
Not only sayest thou, thou would'st shield my life:
Thy watchfulness ere now hath warded death
From Arvan's brow. Nor is thy deed forgot."

Thus spake King Arvan, mindful of the past;
And with his broad hand, hard with battle-toils,
And with much lifting of the hunting-spear,
He smoothed the black locks on fair Chavah's brow,
Loving her well, deeming her love his own;
Seeing he had sure witness to her faith.
Yet was his heart deceived; for in the days
Whereof he spake, though Chavah saved his life,
Revealing all the dark conspiracy,
And how his slaves, mad through his cruelty,
Had made a league to slay him in his sleep;
Yet not for love, but hate, she saved him.
For thus she thought, "The plot will haply fail;
For that the slaves are fierce, but dull of thought,
Tidings will come even to King Arvan's ear:
Then will he, wise through this discovered plot,
Distrust men greatly. So were it right hard
For me, conspiring after, to o'ercome,
Since, howsoever acted, he would fear

Love simulated, and suspect the spare.
Thus would it be. But if the slaves prevail,
And smite King Arvan ere his glory wanes,
And in his sleep, wrapt round with spirit-night,
Then were he spared much misery of heart,
Scarce tasting of the bitterness of death.
Also, if thus he fell by other's craft,
My soul would mourn, orphaned of all delight.
Not so, but first I will destroy his pride
And bring his glory low ; even as a fire,
Burning unseen within its secret caves,
Eats out the mountain's crest : then with a crash
Sudden its lofty crest deserts the sky.
So shall King Arvan fall. I, whom he wronged,
Will slay ; no other hand shall smite him down."
Therefore, she, thinking thus, revealed the plot.

But Arvan, grateful for the service done,
Set on her brow a queenly diadem,
And showed to her kingly courtesy,
Sending her daily from the royal hall
Meats duly chosen. But she hated him
With a deep passionate hate that knew no change,
And ever watched occasion to betray.
And even now, while the great warrior's hand
Caressed her head, she, in her burning heart,
Said, "How long, oh ! how long shall Chavah know
The loathed touch of his accursèd hand,
Nor win sweet vengeance for her father slain ?"

Then Arvan gave her charge, dismissing her,
Saying unto her gently, "Thou may'st go
I thank thee for the love now shown to me.
See thou to it that Athreh's plottings fail

My heart misgives me that she planneth ill,
Willing to quench the life no more her own."

And Chavah, when she knew her audience closed,
Rose from her low seat by King Arvan's side,
And, kneeling low before him, kissed his hand.
Then taking up her stringèd instrument,
She past through the high portal to her place.

There having come, she closed the heavy door,
And sat her low upon the floor of stone,
Revolving angry thoughts within her soul,
And thus she thought, "I may not long endure
King Arvan's presence and his loathèd love ;
For the hate grows within my secret soul
Yet stronger day by day. Oh ! weary hours,
Why bring ye not to Chavah her revenge ?
Have I a slack hand or a wavering heart
That I should fail to compass my resolve ?
Not so ; for I can trust my spirit's strength,
And know it equal to the direst need.
Have I not masked from Arvan's doubtful eyes
The pathway trodden darkly by my will ?
He trusts me even as he trusts his soul.
Who keepeth still the purpose of his heart,
Needing no sympathy from fellow men
To aid endurance of a hidden thought ;
Who, when the hour is come, is strong to strike,
Refraining not for fear of pain or death ;
Hath a sure power over the world of men.
For they all, going on desired paths,
Pursuing gain or pleasure, stand aside,
Nor bar the progress of a burning heart,
Possessed with vengeful thoughts. Are they not blind,

Perceiving not its aim ? other their life ;
And its low mists conceal the upper way.
What, then, restrains me now ? Have I forgiven
King Arvan, for the sake of his smooth words,
Wherewith he seeketh to ensnare my soul ?
Oh ! father, slain on the black slaughter-stone,
Oh ! bitter draught from that loved loathèd cup,
Which Arvan gave to my unknowing hand,
Sinning thereby an unforgiven sin,
Ye are my witnesses. I hate him well.
When the fierce sun-dried deserts of my land
Are a fresh sea of waters, slaking thirst
Of travelling men, where now are barren sands,
Then will I from my memory wipe the wrong.
What then doth clog my feet, that fain would tread
The way to vengeance ? Ah ! right well I know
My soul recoils from shedding Athreh's blood,
Though purposing to slay her. She hath been
Kind unto me, a slave. Though now her heart
Hath turned from the rival who hath snared
King Arvan's love. I spare to work her death,
Remembering earlier hours and kindness done
When I stood low, none caring for my life.
For the queen's diadem that on my brow
Now shines triumphant, then was all ungiven.
Should I then spare her, spilling not her blood ?
She, if she liveth, may defeat my plot,
With watching eyes espying hidden things,
Even when it flowers in all deserved success !
Should I then spare her ? Nay ! I will not spare.
Off evil thoughts that do assail my will ?
She too shall perish. Is she of my blood
That I should save her ? Athreh too must die.

C A N T O V.

QUEEN Athreh sat within her palace hall
Awaiting Chavah's coming. 'Neath her arm
She held the distaff, while she spun the thread
Long-drawn, unstained, from the white wool of sheep ;
For Athreh was among King Arvan's wives,
Wiseest to twine the various-fibred thread ;
Also she was right cunning with her hands
To broider curiously the royal robe,
Making its ruddy folds flash yellow light,
With golden petalled flowers, gloriously wrought,
Such robes wear the immortal gods in heaven.
Now Athreh once had been exceeding fair,
And on the earth her gracious presence made
Light like a day dawn, wheresoe'er she moved ;
For all men knew the beauty of her soul
Was greater than the beauty of her face.
Her had King Arvan wooed in days gone by,
When in a world bright with youth's springtide flowers,
'Neath skies suffused with the fair rosy light
Of dawning joy ; their souls walked hand in hand
O'er earth as in the garden of the gods.
But now her sweetest cheek was thin and worn,
For like a leprosy deep mining grief
Was eating all her life strength slow away.

And as Queen Athreh sat, and bent her head
Golden tressed, beautiful even in decay,
Over the swiftly twining thread of wool,
Gazing upon it with great luminous eyes,
Which yet saw nothing, she reviewed the past,
Sorrowing sadly in her memory
Over the dead joys that once made her life
So bright, she trembled at the excess of bliss,
But that now, shrouded close from every eye,
Lay in her heart like corpses in a tomb.
Yet as she bent her sadly o'er her dead,
Unto her eyes when they beheld each face
Well-known, well-loved, no drop self-pitying came,
For that her heart was broken long ago,
And she had grieved away the grief of tears.

And this Queen Athreh's story. First was she
Of women, of King Arvan ta'en to wife,
And through long years the best beloved of all.
Her had he won by might of his right hand,
When the North chiefs, combined against his sway,
Striving all day beneath the wintry heavens,
Fought by the dumb shores of the frozen sea.
But Arvan's sword prevailèd in the fight.
The Northmen in long lines upon the snow
Lay thick as pebbles on the ocean shore.

So when the sad survivors sued for peace,
And Ommol, king of Morar, being chief,
Sent, as was meet, the herald to the foe,
Seeking King Arvan's face ; then in his tent
The herald stood and spake the message word :
" Arvan, the North chiefs bleed beneath thy sword,
Their wounds are open. Lo ! they pray for grace

That they may bind them ere they bleed to death,
Therefore King Ommol, King of Morar, saith,
'Arvan, I pray thee let the sword be sheathed.' "

So Arvan told his men, bidding them fetch
Into his tent a falchion and a spade,
These gave he into the grave herald's hand,
Then spake a word, "Return thou to thy king,
Say Arvan sendeth thee the sword and spade,
Make thou thy choice. If thou dost choose the spade,
Then may'st thou dig thy fields in all content ;
But give unto me Athreh for my wife.
This if thou wilt not, then take thou the sword,
And guard thee well for I will seek thy hurt."

But when the herald brought King Arvan's gifts,
And spake the words to Ommol and the chiefs,
Knowing their swords were broken, they took thought,
And Ommol though he greatly loathed the choice,
Refrain'd from the sword and took the spade.

Thus Athreh lived with Arvan as his wife ;
He having won her ; and at first they were
Most happy of earth's children, for her love
Was all his own, nor till he won the sword
Sought he to other women. But his mind
Was afterwards high lifted through success ;
And seeing that the kings whom he subdued
Had many wives, his soul was turned away,
Forgetting Athreh and his earlier love ;
And this the sooner that Queen Athreh was
A childless woman, and he craved a son,
Whom he might make heir of the whole round world.
So he took many wives ; and Athreh sat
Mourning at heart, although adorned with gems,

Crownèd with gold, and reverenced as a queen.
And as the little birds forget to sing
When the black shade is on the beauteous sun—
The veil he weareth when his heart is grieved
With the great sorrow that at times doth come,
Albeit unseldom, to the glorious god,
So, Arvan's love eclipsed, her joys grew still,
Nor pipèd they again. Silent she sat ;
And as a little child that hath a wound
Looks at it often, so it doth not heal,
Thus kept she ope the deep wound in her heart.—

To her thus musing sadly on the past,
And of her grief, and of her love's defeat,
Fair Chavah sudden entered in, and stood
Over against her with keen, curious eyes,
That sought to look far down into her soul ;
Then said, " Queen Athreh, wherefore art thou sad ? "

And Athreh answered quick, " I am not sad ; "
For that she scorned to show her of her grief.
" Truly, but thou art sad," Chavah replied ;
" Do I not see it, knowing well the cause ?
These are vain thoughts thou nursest in thine heart ;
Vexing thy soul through loss of Arvan's love.
Why grieveest thou ? " " I grieve not," said the Queen.
" Thou dost ; and I, I mourn to see thee mourn ;
For Athreh, thou art dear unto my soul ;
Seeing my sorrow lessons me in thine."
" Doth Chavah mourn ? " said Athreh, bitterly.
" Hath she not stolen Arvan's love away ?
And is it not her own ? False one, avaunt !
Who stole his heart is Athreh's friend no more."
" Now, Athreh, thou art guilty of a wrong ;

ARVAN;

Deeming me guilty,—me most free from sin.
Say, was it I who stole King Arvan's love?
Well knowest thou thine early power was lost
Ere Arvan's eyes had dwelt upon my face.
How could I thrust aside his proffered gifts?
Or what choice hath a captive? Arvan gave,
And Chavah took, what was no longer thine."
"And thou dost taunt me, Chavah, with my loss!
Go! I would be alone. Seek Arvan's arms,
And triumph in thy prize. Yet shalt thou drink
Hot tears, like me, who now sit desolate."
"Oh Athreh! I could weep hot tears of woe
Even now. Why dost thou scorn my proffered heart,
Stinging it with unkind reproachful words?
Would to the gods that Arvan's love were thine!
I reckon not of his love. My heart is set
Upon the dear hills of my own loved realm,
And on the sun-kissed waste of yellow sand.
See, my soul dieth in this northern clime,
Starved by its barren rocks, chilled by its snows;
Even as a plant ta'en from fair southern shores
Would perish set beneath inclement skies.
I mourn! I mourn! and all my soul is lone!
Lone as the moon after the dawn of day,
When all the lovely stars have left the skies.
Well were it for me lost I Arvan's love,
And gladly Athreh would I yield it thee,
If thou desired'st." Sadly Athreh cried,
Moaning in heart over her vanished joys,
As a she-bear moans o'er its slaughtered cubs,—
Forgetting Chavah's presence utterly:
"Ah! gladly would Queen Athreh own again

What once was hers ; but the fair gem is lost,
Even as a pearl that, won with toil and pain,
Being dropt by chance once more into the sea,
May be no more regained." Chavah replied :
"Great queen that know I not. Thy words are wild,
And grief-led wander widely from the truth.
More than thou dream'st of I may profit thee,
If only I may trust thy silent truth.
Say, can I trust thee, serving thee right well ?
Can'st thou be silent even as the grave,
Wherein lie buried many sons of men,
Yet having tongues wherewith they spake on earth,
But never sound rises to upper air ?"

Then Athreh said : "Speak ! for my tongue is chained
And my ears open." So fair Chavah spoke :
"Know, when I sojourned in the eastern land,
Mine was a slave, deep-learned in cunning lore ;
She could charm down the white moon out of heaven,
Veiling its brightness. She could tame the winds—
Bid them career the earth or sink to rest ;
And (for she loved fair Chavah passing well,
Who served her greatly in her bitter need)
She showed me secret charms that much avail
To rescue hearts sick with disease of love ;
So can I brew love-potions, the which given
Unto a man fill all his soul with fire,
That lapse of years and coldness cannot tame."

And Athreh said : "Would I might trust thine art ;
But all my faith is girdled in with gloom.
If the king's love could die, thy charms must fail."
"Yet wilt thou prove it, Athreh ?" said her foe.
"Only this little gift, this slight reward,

Doth Chavah claim as guerdon for the toil :
When Arvan's love is once again thine own,
Then do thou use thy power for Chavah's sake,
Winning his heart to listen to her prayer.
So shall he loose the fetters from her hands ;
So shall her feet traverse the homeward path,
Seeking the land where she, content of heart,
May dwell among her people in all peace.
This shalt thou swear by the immortal stars,
Who will avenge on thee all breach of truth.
Then shall thy heart's desire be all fulfilled,
And Chavah serve thee, mindful of her faith."

" Oh Chavah ! speakest thou unfeigning words ?
Thy sweet speech, is it like the limpid wave
That floweth forth from out the mountain-breast,
Telling of stored wealth deep-hived within ;
Or are thy words fair-seeming, yet untrue,
Like the false mirage of thine own far land,
That mocks, but cannot quench the wanderer's thirst ?"

" My words are pure, great queen ! I speak no lie.
My heart is toward my country. Arvan's love
Is unto me as a huge heap of gold
Unto a famished wretch who wastes to death,
Poor, although wealthy, lacking flour of wheat.
Why should I keep that which may glad thy heart
Yet fails to solace mine ? My soul is sick
With a great longing to behold once more
With living eyes my country's desert lands.
Should I not yield that which is not a joy
To still the gnawing hunger of my heart ?
If thou could'st win for Chavah that she craves,
Gladly would she, in any future hour,

Wet with her lifeblood thy belovèd feet,
If it might work thy good. Yea, by the stars
Immortal, ever-burning, whose keen gaze
Sees down into the soul, I swear, great queen,
True are my spoken words. May Chavah die
If in her they behold untruthful thought."

Now Athreh, oft when Chavah spake with her,
Had secret warnings in her fluttered heart
Of evil present ; trembling as a hind
In presence of a panther ; shivering cold,
As they against whose breast the silver god—
The moon—uplifts his life-destroying staff,
Yet, after thought repenting, stays his hand.
And now she shuddered greatly, and there came
Over her soul the presage. But she longed
Sorely for Arvan's love, to call it hers
Once, once again ; and the desire prevailed.
For her great passion, though its pride was gone,
Still held place in her heart : even as a root,
With sinewy fibres keepeth hold on earth,
Though the fair stem, with all its pride of leaves,
Hath by the merciless axe been hewn away.
Therefore did Athreh honour Chavah's words,
And this the rather that within the North
Men speaking used still to speak the truth.
"Surely," she thought, "fair Chavah's self would fear
To call in witness the right-judging stars,
Swearing an oath before their burning eyes,
Hiding the while dark treason in her heart."
And so she said, "Chavah, I trust thy words,
Deal thou but truly with me. Grief hath dealt
Sternly with thee and me. Shall we not be

Sisters in help who are akin in woe?
Keep thou thy word, and Athreh will repay
Thy service done even though Athreh's life
Were the price needed." Tremblingly she spoke,
For that her heart was moved exceedingly.

Then Chavah laughèd softly in her soul,
Saying, "She standeth as a desert beast
Who, greedy for the bait, with forward feet
Hath passed even now the pit-fall's hidden edge
Soon to be swallowed in the black abyss.
Shall I not yet prevail above my foes,
Though a chained captive? Yea! I will prevail.
By strength of heart and cunning-worded speech
And lies, I will work out their overthrow.
Athreh stands in the shadow of her doom,
And Arvan's eyes are blinded. Now I need
But prudent counsels and a stablished will.
So shall they fall, arising nevermore."
Thus flamed the fire of vengeance in her heart,
But her eyes shone with mild untroubled light,
While unto Athreh meekly she replied,
"Yea, queen, trust thou thy life to Chavah's love,
Has she not sworn, and the dread stars have heard.
Surely her lips have said no lying words
Before the gaze of the immortal gods.
Now show to me using brief words and plain
How with King Arvan's life was thy life linked,
For charms work with a varied potency,
According to the spiritual might
That hath constrained hearts with love's sweet bonds.
Great is the spell wherewith I will subdue
King Arvan's soul once more to heed thy love,

Yet must it ordered be with utmost care,
According to the nature of his life.
It must be linked with it as soul to flesh,
Or as the perfume to the perfect flower,
Which is itself a portion of the flower,
And to its fair existence addeth grace,
But blended with another bloom would mar,
Driving existence from its hidden cell,
So that the blossom fair would droop in death.
Since without harmony sweet life is lost,
For conflict in a nature's secret cells,
Whence the quick being takes its unseen rise,
Unmarked of human eye, and blossoms forth
To outward observation, as a plant
Develops from the veiled springs of power,
Which the gods' hands place in the least small seed,
Such conflict aye results in marrèd life :
Whereof the dull thought of mere vulgar men
Marks not the cause ; but the instructed heart
Experienced in wisdom, through the years
Wrung in its wrestlings with the unseen powers,
Holds this the sure originating source.
So doth a mountain, very far away
From cultivated lands and homes of men,
Contain within its breast the unknown spring,
Whence rise the watery floods, that rushing on
Through peopled regions do make waste the lands,
That have no knowledge of its secret birth.
Seest thou Athreh, queen of northern lands,
Wherefore I claim from thee informing words,
Revealers of King Arvan's hidden life ;
For I without due knowledge of its course,

Adding my sudden charm unto its hours
Might be as one who with unskilful hands
Addeth a stray note to an unshaped tune,
Which, craving due completeness, would acquire
All beauty from the true, but from the false
Gaineth but hateful discord, marring peace."

So Athreh, urged by Chavah, oped her lips,
And briefly showed the record of her life.
"Portions of this my life to thee are known
Already, Chavah," said she, "yet methinks,
Seeing the heart forgetteth once heard words,
Taking slight heed ; and also they who tell
Show not the truth at times, weaving false tales
Through ignorance or through great love of lies,
Whereto the souls of men are sometimes prone ;
Better it were for thee I should declare
Briefly the changing fortunes of my life,
For ill were it if thou, working the spell,
Shouldest unwillingly, being untaught,
Injure the love-light that thou would'st augment.
Know then, oh ! Chavah, I was Ommol's child,
His only child, much loved of his soul.
And in the days of youth, I, yet a child,
Knew Arvan ; for King Girar, his great sire,
Was Ommol's friend, therefore we children met.
But after, through ill chance and heat of blood,
A strife arose, which, being unappeased,
Sundered the houses till King Girar died.
Thereafter, having lost his path in chase,
King Arvan came unknowing to our towers,
Asking for fire and salt. The which my sire
Granted as fitteth ; nor discerned the truth,

Perceiving not in Arvan, Girar's son.
Afterward, when he knew him, ancient love
Arose once more within his aged breast,
Making him joy in friendship's ties reknit.
Upon the morrow, when for the first meal,
At daydawn, I beside my father stood,
Waiting the guests ; King Arvan, entering in,
Looked on me with large eyes full of command.
But I shrank from him, knowing that my heart
Regarded him with favour, though as then
It knew not of the Love-God's subtle power,
Which overruleth lightly woman's will,
Constraining it to bonds even as he lists ;
For as he doeth to inanimate things,
When he, the strong wind, bendeth the tall trees,
Making them bow their heaven-seeking heads,
Leaf-coronalled, obedient to his power :
So doeth he with mortals, through whose veins
Courseth the purple life-stream, which forth poured
From the large heart, as from a fountain-head,
Changing, new fashions all the course of life.
Since tranquil flowing, man hath joy and rest ;
But, fired by hate, or by the Love-God's might,
Fevered it burns, vexing the grievèd heart,
Till sated are the strange, new-found desires.
Oh ! had I known, fair Chavah, when I gazed
On Arvan at the first—had I but known
The sorrow of the soul, which, wrought of him,
Would overshadow all my after-life—
I would have fled from him, even as men fly
From the consuming rage of unblest flame.
See ! he hath charred my life, making that black

Which once was beautiful with light of flowers,
And peaceful as an unvext summer land
O'erarchèd by a sunlit summer heaven.
Why do the great gods, loving sight of pain,
Deny us knowledge of advancing ills,
Which seen, we shunning, might escape with life,
Which unseen, overwhelm us? Evil hour
That broughtest Arvan's face before mine eyes!
Through thee my life, made utterly a waste,
Mourneth in ashes. Gods unkind to men,
Unkindest unto me, sending ill fate,
Such as no mortal woman, having proved,
Surviveth, like to me, who am a grief,
Yet cannot perish." Then Queen Chavah said,
"Thou needest not to perish. I will give
King Arvan's love into thy hands again,
Even as I said. But, if this might not be,
And thine were, as thou sayest, grief of heart,
Bitter, not to be borne: why shouldst thou bear?
Are there not many pathways out of life,
The which, all undenied, avail to save?
Are there no knives, which, thrust into the breast,
Relieve the captive soul? no venomèd draughts,
Wherefrom grow the cool slumbers of the grave?
Know thou, Queen Athreh, mortals prompt to blame
The all-wise gods, who fashion human life,
Most often moan beneath unneeded pain."

And Athreh answered to her, sad again,
"I am a woman, and not brave to die.
For we in life know ills such as befall
Mortals, whose feet stand in the dust of earth,
And upon whom the sun through the white day,

And the clear moon and stars at night, look down.
These evils can we measure with our thought,
Though they are great, and sore afflict the heart.
But who, O Chavah ! knoweth what dire pains
May wait man in the spectral land of death ?
They who upon us shed throughout life's years
Diseases manifold—fever and chill ;
Pining consumption, wasting the worn frame ;
Brain-sickness, and a thousand nameless griefs—
Who also harass men with other ills,
That utterly subdue the oppressèd soul,
As poverty, and loss of fame and hope ;
Also the death of friends, and shame of soul
(For they desire to humble mortal hearts,
Lest men should deem themselves equal with gods)
May store for those who pass the gates of life
Yet sorer plagues, and torments all unknown
Of shape gigantic, such as the heart sees
Scarcely on earth in dreams." And Chavah said,
" Whate'er they have, held in their hidden stores,
They cannot have aught grievous as earth's life,
For this is of all things that are the worst."

And Athreh answered, " If such thoughts be thine,
Why seekest thou not, Chavah, death's repose ? "
But Chavah said, " I must behold my land
Ere that I die ; also another thought
Is with me, chaining yet my soul to earth,
This will I show thee when thy words are said.
Proceed thou with thy tale." Then Athreh spake,
" Had'st thou but seen him, Chavah, in his youth,
Methinks there live no more such men on earth
In these late days. Even as a column fair,

Which men establish on some battlefield,
Shaped out of precious stone with extreme care,
Memorial of triumph ; so he showed,
Towering in state over the subject earth.
All other men before him seemed as flies
In presence of the bright majestic sun.
Yea ! he was sunlike in his beauty's might,
His tawny hair over his shoulders broad
Fell as the sun's rays fall over the earth ;
And his brave face was even as a god's.
Fool that I was to dream that such as I
Winning, could keep his heart. Others could see
Him also with desiring looks of love ;
Their lips were quick to utter smoother praise
Than my poor falterers. He heard well-pleased.
What man is there who knows false words from true,
When women utter them ? He heard their speech,
As honey in its sweetness ; saw their eyes,
With passion languishing designedly,
Meaning to steal from me his warrior heart.
What help for me was there against their skill ?
I could not feign or flatter, and his thoughts
Were wearied of a wealth long since his own,
And of a face whose once esteemed light
Was waning from it. Therefore his heart's joy
Arose henceforth from others. They had power
To charm love to his eyes, and I was left
Within his home an unregarded thing,
Whose sweet use had departed. Chavah, look ;
Am I not humbled, showing unto thee
Such heaviness of heart ? But I have passed
Through pain that causeth one to lay aside

All shame ; even as a woman wounded sore,
Laying aside her garment, opes her breast,
Else mantled modestly from prying eyes,
Unto the calm hand of the skilful leech,
Unfearing even gaze of stranger men.
Oh ! had King Arvan never won the sword
Whence came my bane. Then had he rested safe
Within his realm, nor wasted other lands,
Nor seen fair captives, spoil of ruddy war,
Whom loving, he regarded me no more."

Then Chavah spake, " Athreh ! King Arvan's queen,
Mourn thou no longer with such sore lament,
For Arvan's love shall yet return to thee,
I promise it, I, Chavah, thy true friend.
See, if he ne'er had loved thee, hard it were
To bind the mighty Love-god to our will,
So that he might implant in Arvan's breast
Seeds of a passionate love, having quick life ;
For that he causeth men to love at will,
Nor may he be constrained in his toil.
But where his hands have sown seeds of desire,
E'en though all trace thereof have passed away
For earthly eyes, eluding man's dim sight,
Be sure the root abides for evermore.
For from the past no man himself can free,
Henceforward is it portion of his life.
As when the larch puts forward in the spring
The long, green, bristled shoot, and its bright crest
Forgets the lower air, wherein was passed
Its earlier being, yet the former life
Through all the woody stem, even to the soil,
Is present still, nor aught hath past away.

Now hearken to me. Thou didst speak erewhile
Questioning, why, I, hating greatly life,
Nor fearing death, yet breathed the air of earth.
In mine own land, ere I became a slave,
Fallen in estate, spoiled of all former joys,
There was a prince, young, strong, valiant of heart,
Well favoured also above other men,
Who lovèd me. He, in the giant strife,
When Arvan of the sword o'erthrew my sire,
Was stricken down, wounded with many wounds,
Yet was his life whole in him. Still he lives ;
For tidings came to me showing the truth,
Also he loves me as in days of old."

"Thou lovest him," said Athreh, "with great love
Enduring, such as is his love for thee ?"

"With love o'erpassing words," Chavah replied,
"From early days his hands have touched mine own,
Meeting as met our hearts. Our fathers gave
Our lives to be at one, and our own thoughts
Approved their purpose. Askest thou, oh, queen !
Whether I love the man, whose treasured name
I will not speak with slavery-soilèd lips ?
Truly I love him, prizing him above
Treasure of gems, and peace, and length of days.
Might I but gaze upon his face again,
I with content of heart could lay life down.
Him still unseen, methinks that I could scarce
Find sleep, even in the calm grave's restful couch,
Wherein life-wearied men at last have rest.
Day after day, I wearying with desire,
Long after him with infinite pain of soul,
Heart-hungered for his presence I abide,

Famished for lack of love, even in these halls ;
Yea, e'en though dowered with King Arvan's love.
His presence do I long for. Unto me,
Restoring unto thee King Arvan's heart,
Grant that I may behold his face once more."

These words said Chavah unto Arvan's queen ;
But Chavah lièd to her, for her heart
Was loveless, neither had she cared for man.

Athreh replied, " This love be as a bond
'Twixt thee and me. Henceforth with linkèd strength
Will we toil on, accomplishing our ends.
For since thou too hast provèd kindred grief,
Thy soul will surely comprehend my woe,
More nearly, Chavah, than were possible
From artful ordering of eloquent words ;
Since speech is but a poor interpreter
Whereby men may make plain deep-seated grief.
Who feeleth pain, alone doth understand ;
For the gods teach him, speaking their own tongue,
Which, though unheard of those who stand around,
Revealeth many things unto the soul."

She ceased ; and Chavah, straightway answering, said,
" Verily, Athreh, all thy words are truth :
Knowing love-sorrow, I can measure thine.
Therefore sweet pity, rising in my soul,
Abides for thee ; as in a desert-well,
Fashioned by frequent blows of the sharp steel,
Earth-piercing offspring of exceeding toil,
Girt round with many leagues of burning waste,
Lies the cool wave, grateful to man and beast,
A fountain of refreshment. Athreh ! such
Is my soul's pity, making glad thy ways,

And strengthening thee with new delight of life."

"It shall be thus," said Athreh: "I will take
Right joyously from thy accepted hand
The gift of Arvan's love, restored anew.
Why should I hesitate, or turn aside
From thy true-hearted service? It is meet
That we, robbed by the evil, hating powers
Of treasures once our own, should use such strength
And wisdom of the heart as may be ours,
Since the gods also gave them to this end."

"Truth, Athreh! mighty queen," Chavah replied.

"We, compassed in this life by adverse powers,
The hateful strength of alien essences,
Spiritual kings of darkness, strong to harm;
Oppressed by obscure treacheries, wherewith
Eyes like to ours, clay-darkened, are deceived,
By the immortals, workers of all wrong,
Must with our deeds and thoughts, even as we may,
Guard our assaulted lives from shocks of ill,
Establishing our souls, lest that they fail.
Such end is pious, much to be desired;
For we, white offspring of the mighty Sun,
The flaming god, have natures all averse
To murky gloom, gladly desiring light,
And dwelling in its presence with all peace.
Therefore let us, upstriving towards joy,
Not over-carefully observe the path
Which leads us from the night to clear-faced day.
Surely no wrong is whence arises right."

"Thou dost persuade my soul," said Athreh's voice,

"Allaying all my fears. Yea, I will prove
Thy magic skill. Holy must be the power

That overthroweth wrought-out work of ill,
Restoring to sore-vexèd hearts their peace."

Then Chavah answered, "As thy will is mine,
Thou shalt have that great treasure of thy heart—
Long vainly longed-for of thee—Arvan's love;
Only forget not, when thy woman's crown,
Of love surpassing, once more on thy brow
Shines with untarnished splendour, that my hands,
Even mine, restored it to thy spoiled front.
Queen Athreh, as my toil, be my reward,
Me also give back to my lover's arms.

C A N T O V I.

LOVE is most fair of gods. He is of heaven,
And waketh sunshine, wheresoe'er he moves,
In the immortals' hearts. But not alone
Treads he the sky-fields. Oft he wingeth swift,
Through the rosed clouds, his airy path to earth.
There maketh he his joyous presence known
By gracious smiles, and by all-tender joys,
And words reposeful, and unfeigning gaze,
That where he treadeth blossom on his way.
Yet doth he walk uncertainly earth's fields,
And giveth love-gifts into unsure hands ;
For that the gods, jealous of mortal bliss,
Shroud in a grave-cloth Love's sweet countenance,
And darken his bright eyes, ere he hath leave
From the sky-rulers to descend to earth.
Therefore some hearts dread the fair god's approach,
Deeming he is a veiled form of death,
And their souls shun him, who is yet a friend :
Whilst unto all his gifts at random given
Rest often here in all unworthy hands,
That but defile them with polluting touch.

Lo ! wandering along the ways of life,
Love met, in an all-sunny idle hour,
With Lygrul, son of Cardol, there in haste

He gave him the love-treasure, hiding it
Deep from all eyes within his inmost heart.
Then was he wholly filled with pleasant thoughts,
And gazed on Chavah with delight of soul.
But, being heart-corrupt, his love was soiled,
Mingled with fierce desire ; as pleasant wine,
Fire-filled, a joyous drink for gods and men,
Is evil if quick venom mar the bowl.
So with an unwise love, strong to destroy,
Lygrul, the captain of King Arvan's guard,
Loved Chavah, black-haired daughter of the East.
Looking upon her ever with fierce eyes
Of eager longing, loving her above
All women, women-born, upon the earth ;
Also upon a day he showed his love.

Then Chavah said, "Think'st thou a mighty queen
Would stoop to the embraces of a slave ?
If thou would'st win me, wear thyself a crown.
I love not subject men." And Lygrul said,
"Callest thou me, who am a prince, a slave ?"
Chavah replied, "All men are slaves or kings.
Thou art no king, and therefore art a slave."
And Lygrul, angered, stormily replied,
"I too will one day wear a kingly crown,
Then shalt thou pray my pardon in mine arms."

Now Chavah cared not for Lygrul's love ;
But when she thought on it, her vengeful heart
Shaped it to be the sword of her revenge,
For thus she said, "If Lygrul loveth me,
He will hate Arvan. Need I not a man
Who hates him, sorely ? Yea, in very truth.
So then I will bribe Lygrul with myself

Virtue, that might have shrunk from Arvan's gold,
May stoop to such a bribe. When wrought the task,
May I not slay him ere he win the wage.

Thus in an hour when they two stood alone,
It was the morrow of the sacrifice,
Chavah said to him, looking through his eyes,
"Is thy heart strong? Wouldest thou reign a king
Over the widest realm in all the earth;
And also have fair Chavah to thy wife?"

Then he replied, "Why askest thou, great queen?
Would the chained captive gladly change his cell,
Dark, lightless, for the splendours of a throne?
Would the half-famished wretch turn cold away
From gracious hands, that proffer flour of wheat?
Surely thou know'st my will though I be dumb?
Yea, I would be a king—would have thy love!"

And Chavah said: "If thou these things would'st win,
They are thine own. Only be brave of heart
And do my bidding. Hearken! thou shalt have
Earth's mightiest realm. I too will be thy queen.
But one thing must thou do to win the bright
And glorious treasure shown to thee of hope.
Thou must slay Arvan first! My thought is shown."

But Lygrul backward started, as a man
Who, sudden, standing in a woodland glade,
Seeth a snake glide out before his feet.
"Slay Arvan!" faltered he: "He hath the sword.
Who can prevail against him? Hath he not,
By its dread might o'erthrown the leaguèd kings
Of the wide earth in many a bloody field?
How shall my hands succeed where nations failed?"
"They shall succeed," said Chavah; "they shall win

The prize out of destruction's black abyss,
Which hath engulfed the nations of the earth.
Be thou but true and of unfearing heart.
Am I not with thee? Shall our purpose fail?
Know thou a woman's hands, she hating well,
Are mightier to o'erthrow than armed bands,
Earth-covering, of shielded warrior-men.
Nor fear thou lack of weapons, wherewithal
To hew from triumph's tree the well-leaved boughs
That shall our victor purpose fitly crown.
Who seeks for instruments to do great deeds
Finds them aye ready to the hand. It is
The heart to wield the weapon that man needs;
The sword awaits the grasp." But Lygrul said,
Stammering, with faltering tongue: "'Tis vain, great
queen ;
Hide thou thy thought within thy bosom's cell.
Tell thou to none what thou hast shown to me,
Else wert thou lost. For me, I love thee well.
Wild horses, that man's body limb from limb
Rend utterly, could tear no word of thine,
That through the ears hath entered Lygrul's heart,
Forth from its resting-place. Yet I refuse
To do thy will. Doing it, I were lost,
And thou not profited." Then Chavah said,—
Scorning his craven spirit in her soul;
She being braver than a leopardess,
That dwelleth lone in a far eastern waste:
"Art thou a man? Thy form is as a man's!
Thy lips are hair-veiled! Thy long tawny beard
Falls like a lion's mane upon thy breast!
Yet sure thy shape and bearded face but lie.

Thou can'st not claim the honoured name of man.
Why, thou art weaker than a puny girl,
Who hides her milk-white face in her two hands
When the delight of danger draweth near !
Thou a shield-lifter ! striker with the sword !
Shame on thy beard, that hides a craven breast.
Lay thy bright falchion by ; or give the blade
To some weak woman, braver yet than thou."

But Lygrul, angered, sullen, turned aside,
Then muttered slowly, with averted face :
" Vainly thou tauntest, Chavah ; for thy words
Lack wisdom. But mine eyes have learnt to know.
Thou hast not seen the sword. Its awful light
Blazes portentous o'er the ranks of war,
Filling all hearts with terror. Fierce it shines,
Dismaying nations : like the awful star,
That from the blue depths of his unseen home,
Opening his golden gates, doth swift descend,
His glittering hair far-streaming on the wind.
How can I dare its might ? My sword is sharp ;
Yet were it but a reed when matched with his.
Ask me no more, oh Chavah ! It is vain
To strive with Arvan. Had we but the sword,
Then were it otherwise. But hope's fair face
Is turned aside. Her unpropitious hand
Points not the path whereby our feet must tread."
" The sword ! the sword ! and then again the sword !
Methinks thou dost forget thy father's tongue ;
For all thy language dwindles to a word.
What ! hath King Arvan's sword palsied thy brain ?
Hath it scared all the courage from thy heart ;
And left thee, Thing, a weak-willed, abject wretch,

The scorn of women, who would scorn such fear ?
Ah ! Chavah must seek out some other friend
To strike the hard chains from her wounded limbs ;
For Lygrul hath outlived his ancient self,
And valour, that once dwelt within his breast,
Hath left its dwelling empty as a fane
Whence the bright god has fled. Where shall I turn ?
Where seek for succour if his succour fail ?
Oh Chavah ! Chavah ! desolate thou art ;
For even they, who say they love thee, lie !”

Thus spake she, and her hard words, in his soul,
Roused the strong passion, crouching behind fear,
Then o’er its prostrate form it rushed to day.
“Bright queen, I do not lie, I love thee well.
Yea ! I would risk right willingly my life,
Stood it alone. But see, the plot must fail,
So were thy fair life wrecked even with mine.
Were it not wiser then to wait a space ;
For the gods’ hands work out full many a change
In human life, sometimes exalting man,
Then dashing him to earth. Surely at last
King Arvan, who hath trampled down the world,
Will find due recompense. For the gods reign.”

But Chavah, writhing, bowed her lovely head,
And cried out bitterly, “There are no gods ;
Or, if there be, they heed not mortal pain.
If there were gods, would they behold such wrongs
As have bowed down my spirit to the earth,
Nor with strong hands have smitten down my foe ?
The skies are empty of avenging power.
The heavens are full of lying and deceit.
The stars look down with cold indifferent eyes,

That seem to see, yet see not human woe ;
And over earth wander no feet divine.
We only are the builders of our fate.
Who dares be brave ruleth the subject world ;
Even danger's self recoils before his gaze,
Like a wild beast that terrified retreats,
Cowed by unfearing eyes. Yet would it rend
The timorous fugitive. Hast thou no heart,
Who seest my soul bowed down before thy feet,
Imploring help, and turnest cold away ?
Can it be Chavah humbled in the dust,
Who cries to thee to stretch out saving hands,
And thou, who spurnest her in her despair ?
Full surely, Lygrul, thou art greatly changed.
Or Lygrul's courage fails, or Lygrul's love,
Else Chavah would not proffer prayers in vain.
Oh ! thou, whose weak heart shrinks from Arvan's sword,
Were it the white, straight-striking bolt of heaven,
Thou should'st not dread it. Why, it can but slay."

But Lygrul flushed up to the tawny hair,
That clouded round the margin of his brow,
With mingled rage and shame, her answering straight,
" Why dost thou sting my heart with venom'd words ?
Well knowest thou since Arvan wields the sword
No warrior strength avails. The hostile powers
Melt at his coming, like the northern ice
When the spring sun returns. The firm knit knees
Tremble. The strong arm drops the sheltering shield ;
And all hearts are as water. I have seen
King Arvan's pathway through the serried ranks
Strewed with dead men ; even as the woodman's way
Through forest lands are strewed with fallen trees.

Know, Chavah, I would surely walk to death
If it might pleasure thee. But what avails
To plot for Arvan's death, and wreck my life?
His were no loss; nor would'st thou greatly gain,
Having few friends, would'st thou those friends destroy?"

Then Chavah, seeing that her taunts were vain;
For that his spirit feared the magic glaive,
Paused, answering not; and on her small, soft hand
Rested her delicate head, rich with great wealth
Of ebon hair, revolving silent thoughts,

At last a gleam of light broke o'er her face,
Chasing the gloom. Then raised she her head,
And smiled, and said full gently, "Lygrul! hear.
Had we the sword, might then our plottings stand?"

But he replied, "If such a thing might be,
Were but the sword-hilt wedded to my hand
King Arvan's power were broken. There are men
Whose hearts lament, crushed down by hopelessness,
Who would arise and strike their hands in mine,
Greedy to wreak on him remembered wrongs.
Yet what avails to think on what might be?
These are but visioned dreams, that may not brave
The cold, clear light of truth-revealing day."

Then Chavah to him spake, answering his words,
"That the heart dreams, unfearing hands may do.
What should resist my will? I fear not man,
Nor death, nor the dread fate that through the world
Stalks on its silent way. These, and aught else,
That stands with adverse brows upon my path,
Make but more precious my desired revenge.
Lay thou thy plot. I answer for the sword.
For me, I trust not wholly to its might.

Fear blinds the eyes of men, and Fancy lends
Weird powers to simplest things ; if but success
Spread her strange witcheries, dazzling erring thought.
Be Arvan's magic falchion what it may,
Strongest of weapons yet, within the world,
Are dauntless hands, and hearts prepared to die.
Speak, Lygrul, for I listen. Who are they
Whose hands shall aid us in the great attempt,
Digging for Arvan's power the yawning grave ?"

Then Lygrul answered thoughtful, " Mighty Queen
Chavah, there are full many to our choice,
For Arvan is much hated among men.

As yet all hearts shrink back before his might,
Like banded wolves before the lion's strength.
Let them but know the lion's strength is spent,
They will rush in and rend him. Fear thou not,
Lest haters fail. Tyrants are rich in foes."

" Choose thou not many, Lygrul. If the chain
Have many links, more chance that one may fail.
Short be the chain and few the links, but sure."

" Truth, queen," he said, " thy thought is also mine ;
Therefore my tongue shall but declare the names
Of those whose wills are steadfast. Chief of these
Is Zular. Him thou hast not seen, yet know'st
Doubtless his name. Dwells not his mourning bride
With captive women in King Arvan's halls ?

Fairer she was than morning-star which shines
Through dew-clouds, silver-pure. And he was brave—
No wild boar braver, that with tusky teeth
Hurls back the clamorous dogs with upripped sides,
And charges onward. But King Arvan came,
Spoiler of kingdoms—waster of the world.

Then Zular and his Ava's father stood,
Varak, grey chief, whose name is known in war,
They stood with chosen warriors of their race,
All strong to strive and die. Oh! Chavah, bright,
Thou who dost scorn King Arvan's potent sword,
Hadst thou but seen it on that day of blood,
Even as mine eyes beheld it. Varak died,
Still grasping even in death his battle brand,
Facing the foe with clenched, unpraying lips,
That sought no mercy. His grey hair I marked,
Soiled with defiling dust and clots of blood.
Around him lay his mighty men in heaps,
Like merchant bales, the spoils of many towns,
Rich silk and cloth, in wild confusion tost,
Flung down in some all-wild, precipitate flight
By panic-stricken hosts. Zular was dashed
Senseless to earth. Yet in him life remained,
So he became a captive, doomed to grace
King Arvan's triumph, stoop his haughty neck
To bear the servile yoke, hear with stung heart
The brutal jests, and see his Ava led,
The prey of others, to a loathed couch.
Surely if aught avails to wound the heart,
His heart doth bleed. Yea! he hates Arvan well;
With an enduring hate that shall out-last
Kingdoms and fall of thrones, ay, even life."
"I do believe thee," Chavah said, and smiled,
"His hate should be as a black basalt rock,
Somewhat whereon to build. His bride I know.
Truly they loved. She mourneth even now.
Speak thou unto him, Lygrul. Say wise words
That will blow off the patience, ashy gray,

That gathers o'er the embers of his rage,
And wake new fire within his warrior-heart.
Bring thou to him sad tidings of his bride,
His Ava, captive to a brutal lord.
Say thou hast heard from me she grieveth much,
And sigheth for deliverance. Stir his heart
With frequent mention of his grievous wrongs ;
No task is hard, if injured love command.
He will flash fire like flint at touch of steel,
If thou dost strike ; for his is a brave heart,
Though now o'erwhelmed by adverse-thoughtèd fate.
He will do fitting service in our need.
Whom hast thou more ? " Hercar, I deem, would be,"
Said he, " a fellow-helper. He hath wrongs :
Also he hath an unforgiving soul."
" The name I know," said Chavah, " yet the sound
Recalls not to my mind distress of life.
What is his story ? Haply thou dost know.
If so, reveal it ; for my mind is dark."
Then Lygrul spake, " His wrongs are far away,
Of men well-nigh forgotten ; but his heart
Hath a strong hold on griefs. Tight is its clasp,
Firmer than ivy's clasp round sapling stem,
Which may be severed by the labourer's axe,
But even in death will yet maintain its hold,
Nor loosen its embrace. Thou may'st have heard
His tale ; but there are many stricken lives
In Arvan's land, that teems with human woe.
This is an ancient wrong, that chanced when thou
Scarce with thy dawning light mad'st glad the earth.
Hearing it, thou would'st not remember long
Such undistinguished grief. He suffers that

Which many a prince hath suffered ; but he broods
Over his wrongs ; and they have waxed great,
Till, spreading, they have over-gloomed his soul
With their drear, poisonous shade. Therefore he is
A fit associate. Look thou on his life ;
I will renew its shape before thine eyes,
Then thou thyself shalt judge. He was a prince,
Lord of a southern land, populous, fair ;
The mountains were o'erglimmered with white flocks
Of browsing sheep, countless in multitude
As the white clouds that on a summer morn
O'rfleece the heavens. The vales were gilt with wheat.
The hills were red with children of the vine,
Grapes, man-rejoicing. All the coasts were full
Of peaceful peoples. Then King Arvan heard
Fame of the land, and in his conqueror's soul
He coveted its wealth. Therefore he sent
A word to Hercar, ' Arvan, king of men,
Saith, render to me now wheat-flour, and wine.
Am not I lord ? Therefore ungird thy glaive,
And lay aside thy crown.' But Hercar scorned
The message ; and he took the messengers,
And shore their beards, and clipt their comely hair :
Then sent them back to Arvan, bearing words
Opprobrious, bitter to his haughty soul.
' Thus doth Prince Hercar, king of valley lands,
Of rivers, and of mountains, shear the men,
Servants of Arvan. As he mocketh them,
So will he mock their lord.' And Arvan armed,
And poured his desolating multitudes
Over the fair fields of that wide domain.
Soon were Prince Hercar's armies overthrown,

While through the pleasant coasts the wasters past,
Like bands of locusts, eating up the lands.
Then were the peasant men slain in the fields,
Their women dashed to pieces, and their babes
Tossed on the shining points of cruel spears ;
Whilst from the burning towns went up the smoke
Of blackening desolation. But the prince,
Pent in the capital, sued not for grace,
Knowing 'twas vain ; but sternly kept the wall,
Awaiting promised succours from the East.
So the months passed ; and still he watched in vain :
And with the passing months the famine grew
Direr within the city. All things failed
Life-nourishing ; and the wolf rose in men,
Silencing mercy's voice. With evil eyes
Men looked upon their wives. And mothers fair,
And delicate, eating their children's flesh,
Laughed loud hyæna-laugh of dread delight
Over their loathly meal. Darker, more deep,
Sank down the gloom over the stately town,
That once sat like a bride upon the hills ;
And all eyes, from the rampart walls, in vain
Strained for the coming succour. Last it came.
Over the hills it glimmered far away ;
The lightning shimmer of long lines of spears,
The yellow blaze of brazen-studded shields,
The menacing iron light from corslets flung
Of countless warrior-men, whose dense array
Swept down the slopes like surging thunder-clouds.
So Arvan, like a lion, turning fierce
From an expiring prey to meet a foe
New threatening, drew back his armed men,

And marchèd forwards. As the rearward passed
Prince Hercar sallied forth with scanty files
Of men, half skeletons, all that remained
Of what were warriors. Then the conflict raged,
And the great battle dust went up to heaven ;
Targets were rent, and blood poured out on earth ;
Till the great river that moved slowly by
Before the city, took a stain of blood,
And groaned beneath the bodies of the slain.
But Arvan's star prevailed. The Eastern men
Fled fast and far. Hercar was driven back,
With a mere handful flying from the foe,
Who through the city's gates pursued the prince
Even to his palace. There he hid his head,
Seeking concealment. But the searchers past
Throughout the palace-rooms, and dragged him forth
From that his hiding place, being yet alive ;
Nor wounded sorely. So they brought him bound
To Arvan, king of men, who spared his life,
Nor offered him as sacrifice ; and this,
Not out of mercy, for the prince sought death ;
But Arvan deemed a sorrowing servile life
Bitterer than death, and saved him from the sword
Through hatred and contempt. Such is his tale."

And Chavah answered, "Doth he yet survive ?
His land destroyed ! His royal town o'erthrown !
And his true subjects slaughtered ! Was he ta'en,
Not stricken senseless on the battlefield,
But a mere flyer refuged in his hall,
Crouching behind the fragments of a throne ?
He nests not valour in his bloodless heart ;
And we need brave men, Lygrul. Seek thou round

Among'st King Arvan's foes. Choose thou again,
The men we need are they who go to death
As to a banquet. This man's soul recoiled
From that his meanest braved. Weak is his soul !
What profiteth he us ? Now, by my life,
I scorn the coward." Answering, Lygrul said,
"Thou doest him injustice, being prone
To passion. See thou in his life thine own.
He doth survive for vengeance. Nor is he
Wanting in valour, when it serves his aim.
He hath the courage that conspirers need,
Though not the courage that on battlefields
Armeth man's breast to meet the hostile sword.
Him have I marked in his long captive hours,
And he is patient under injury,
And humble to the oppressor, whom he hates.
Also he hath the gift to hold his peace,
Being more silent than a tongueless bell ;
And, or I greatly err, his fangèd hate,
Though it but seldom bite, yet, when it turns
And fastens, will prove mortal. He is still,
But only still because he bides his time.
When the sun rising showeth him his prey
Doubt not his readiness." And Chavah said :
"Well, as thou wilt. I prize not much his aid.
Women may well be patient, being weak,
But men should strike. Hast thou another name—
One whose hand loves the steel ? It will suffice."
"Daros is Arvan's foe ; his arm might aid.
He was his rival in the former years,
And bore a mightier name, a keener sword.
But after grievous struggles, when his bands

Fainted and were but few,—for Arvan's glaive
Struck death-gaps through the ranks,—then he with-
drew

Beyond the limits of his sway, and dwelt
Over the hills in rocky fastnesses,
Whose granite windings mocked King Arvan's power,
And foiled his warriors. But on a day,
Daros, betrayed for gold, was, in a cave,
Ta'en sleeping unawares. And now he lives,
A prisoner, within the dungeon strong.
Him I, as captain of King Arvan's guard,
Hold in close durance by the king's command,
Till such time as the tribe, wholly o'erthrown,
He may be offered up a sacrifice.
For, but of late, grieved by the overthrow
Of Lewar, who, in absence of the king,
Tracked Daros' warriors to the eastern wilds,
And, being surprised by the all-vigilant foe,
Was driven in headlong rout for many a league,
Arvan had sworn to prosecute the war
Relentlessly, with an unsparing hand,
Till, every armed resistance wholly crushed,
Daros should to the Sun be offered up,
As a thank-offering for triumphant war.
Yet now, I deem, the oath will not be loosed,
Or not for many days. The Western war,
Decreed of late, will claim the utmost power
Even of the unconquered wielder of the sword ;
Seeing the land he fain would bind in chains
Hath never stooped the neck to any yoke.
Vast—rich in gold is she—her children brave ;
One to be crushed, not conquered." There a light

Flashed in fair Chavah's eyes, when that she heard
Mention of imminent strife ; and she replied :
" Sayest thou, Lygrul ? Doth such war approach—
Arching its roof of storm o'er Arvan's head ?
Or show thy hopes as facts—like unto ghosts,
Void of all substance even as summer air,
Which, being all impalpable to touch,
Seem yet earth-filling men." " Chavah," he said,
" It is no dream. Know, Arvan spake of strife
In the great hall of feasting in the night ;
And ere we sought the god with sacrifice,
Propitious rendering, of the chiefest men,
Ta'en in the war, white-limbed, who fed the fire,
Sacred that burneth in the inner fane,
The great king held a council in the room
Of wisdom, sitting on the basalt throne,
Hearing the truth-words. Heard I not myself,
Being among the wise men of the realm,
Even as thou wottest ? Know, King Arvan's word
Went forth decreeing war." Then Chavah said :
" 'Tis well ! He deemeth in his haughty heart
He shall go forth, and trample down the foe,
Returning with much spoil of slaughtered men.
Let him go forth. He shall return no more.
Lygrul, thou spakest of an evil fate,
That might involve in utter gloom the sun,
Fair-shining, of King Arvan's warrior life,
That hath so long, with hateful, impious glare,
Grieved my much-aching eyes. Oh ! Lygrul, look !
Even now the hour hath come. He goeth forth
Unknowing to his doom : as a great ox
Moves towards the priestly steel, well-whetted, clean,

That shall spill all his blood on the dry earth.
Now need we a strong hand, that, in the strife,
Upreared behind, shall smite him to the dust
With no uncertain blow. In hours of war
All things are possible. The strongest throne,
Down-shaken by that earthquake, strews the dust.
Let us be brave, and venture our attempt,
Strengthening our hands against King Arvan's power.
No need to lay aside all hopes of life,
Seeing in strife men may deal deadly blows,
O'erthrowing lives, and kingly breasts are pierced
By watching hands, even though hedged around
By mailed guards, while yet the slayer lives.
For in the tumult these things 'scape the eyes
Of heated warrior-men, mad with the joy
Of man-destroying strife, drunken with blood.
Thinkest thou, Lygrul, that, amidst the wild,
Tumultuous eddies of the reeling fray,
Thyself could'st with a following of brave men,
Haters of Arvan, closing round his life,
Fall on him and oppress him, giving o'er
The blood-stained monarch to the foeman's hands?"

Lygrul replied, "Great queen, it may not be.
I, being captain of King Arvan's guard,
Am strong to dare, beyond the meaner herd
Of warrior-men; nor would I shrink aside,
Scared even by word like 'treason;' for success
O'er-gilds all crimes; and names are only names.
But all men in their hearts do fear the sword.
I should dread failure, made I the attempt,
He being yet a wielder of the glaive;
Yet am I brave." Then Chavah answering said,

“Whet thou thy steel, for thou wilt need its edge.
Erelong thou shalt assail the man I hate.
Myself will show the path. Fly ! 'tis a step
It draweth nearer yet. Lygrul, away !
See ! we must shun to waken from their sleep
Suspicion's light-roused eyes.” Then Lygrul past
By an opposing door from Chavah's room,
Shunning surprise ; and Chavah was alone.

The light step that she heard some other way
Moved down the long-resounding corridor ;
Therefore fair Chavah sat and musèd on,
“What shall be done,” she thought, “for these men shrink,
Mere timorous-hearted wretches, from the deed ?
Myself must work deliverance. He might die—
Die by my hand ; and, wounded unto death,
Know her who slays him. Die ! die by my hand !
Ah ! have I strength to slay him ? In my soul
I feel a burning hate ; but then my hands
Are woman-weak. It may be, I should shrink
From sight, though not from thought of causing pain.
Moreover, if I slew him in his sleep,
He would escape all sorrow of the heart,
Holding his kingly power unto the end.
That was not mine intent. No ! he must live
Till he hath proved the grief of failing power,
And courage unavailing in the strife.
Let me seek out once more a fairer path
To his destruction. What a thing it is
To be a woman, quick to feel a wrong,
Slow to avenge it ! For our weakness thwarts
Our will from its intent. My father's gods,
Bright burning stars ! Were I, as in the days

Vanished for aye, I would seek counsel now
From your bright presence. But who failed the sire
Cannot defend the child. I stand alone,
Friendless and godless, framer of my doom.
I cannot slay him. Well ! perhaps 'tis well ;
For if I slew him he would 'scape much pain.
How can I quench his power ? That stands secure,
Dreaded of all men, fenced from blows of fate.
Might I not steal the sword ? God-given thought !
Surely my weak strength may for this suffice.
Swordless, he is but man, and so must stoop
His lofty crest ; for he hath earned much hate.
It will o'ercome his power. Yes ! he shall drink
Sleep-draughts of wine, and slumber on my knees.
Then shall he come into the spoiler's hands,
And his might be as water." And she rose,
Glad with the thought of vengeance. Up and down,
Pacing the room even like a hungry beast,
Caged, half-famished, thinking thoughts of blood.

CANTO VII.

QUEEN ATHREH had held conflict in her heart,
Whether her soul should lend a listening ear
To Chavah, offering to work the charm
That should restore to her King Arvan's love ;
For doubtful-voiced, within her vexèd breast,
The sensitive spirit pleaded restlessly,
Urging ill doubts, disquieting the soul,
Now this, now that alleging : prompt to change
The colour of the action, till at times
She doubted of its fitness ; or again,
When sunnier thoughts drew near, felt all assured
Of its convenient rightfulness. And thus
Days had gone by since first fair Chavah made
Her specious offer, tempting her adown
Destruction's path. And sometimes sadly said
Her spirit's voice, in her lone communings,
" Would Athreh owe to evil magic charm
King Arvan's love, that ne'er might be rewon
By Athreh's faithfulness ? Might such a heart,
Untrue, far wandering from its plighted faith,
Conquered anew only by potent spell
O'ermastering, have worth as in old days,
When it made rich the heart ? 'Tis a vain thought.
Love given not for love, whate'er the soul

Lightly deceived may hope, existeth not,
Save in sick fancy's dream, which feverishly
Simulates that which is, by airy shapes
Brain-born, existenceless. Also, 'twere shame
Stooping to take from Chavah's hands the gift
Which, had she stolen not, were yet mine own.
No ! I will not receive it. I will be
Alone henceforward. Let her keep her prize,
And leave me to my sorrow. Ne'er will I,
Who reigned once a queen in Arvan's heart,
He having failed me, win through magic spell,
Wrought out by her, that which was wholly mine.
Yet will I love him truly to the end,
For a north woman may not change her love.
Nor shall he know that I have loved him thus ;
But I will hide the love deep in my heart,
And overmantle it with cunning veil
Of deepest secresy, till Arvan's eyes
Think wholly lost the treasure he despised."

Thus went her thoughts, sad-tinted. Then a cloud
Would gather on her brow, and from her eyes
The light would fail, hope-kindled. So for days
She would wage strife against her soul, that craved
To woo back Arvan to her empty arms.
Then would she build up wisest arguments,
And thoughtful guard against returning love,
Lest it should subject her again, once more.
But as a little child, who on the shore,
When the great sea hath ebbed, and far away
Its waters gleam, hath raised low dykes of sand,
Mindless of ocean's might, dreaming to bar
The onward march of waves, yet sees erelong

The tide return, and all its mounded walls
Levelled once more with the great plain of sand
That girds the main : so Athreh, when the love
Ebbed, with its memoried treasures numberless,
Leaving all bare her life, would raise up guards
Of prudentest resolve, which yet, full soon,
Felt the great strength of the advancing flow
Of passionate tenderness. Then would she feel
Heart-humbled, willing to accept all shame—
Even that greatest, woman's heart can know,
Taking from rival hands the treasured prize,
That she who lost was forceless to regain.

So, on a day, she, maddened by long grief,
Vexed by sweet memories of olden days,
And haunting shapes of each unpriced caress,
Wherewith her husband in the sunny hours
Of new linked life, had made her glad heart bound,
And all her body quiver with delight,
Flung her calm, prudent counsels to the winds,
Resolving in her heart to prove the spell.
For thus she said, " I cannot live alone,
Defrauded thus of every heart-delight.
If Chavah mock me with an idle hope,
Willing to grieve the heart her sin hath crushed,
With shadowy dream unfounded, and to plant
Her feet disdainful on my humbled form,
So let it be. Lower I cannot fall ;
For now my sad heart slowly bleeds to death
With all its unseen wounds, and each dark year
Steals from me some poor fragment of my life ;
As every billow beating on a wreck,
Once a fair ship and stately, rends away

Some shapely plank, leaving the battered ribs
Ghastlier with every blow. She may be true
And help me in my dire necessity.
She too hath known much anguish in her life ;
And sorrow is a softener of the heart.
But true or false my soul must dare the chance ;
For, succourless, I perish utterly.
If her aid fail me, I can only die."

Thus thought she, acting sudden on the thought,
Seeking out Chavah straightway where she sat
In her high hall, with forward-seeking eyes,
That looked far o'er the heaving world of waves,
Adown the path, sunlit with burning gold,
To where the great sun rested his bright face,
Broad as a brazen war-shield, on the wave.

But Chavah saw her not ; for that her thoughts
Had travelled far adown the shadowy past,
And knew not of the world of present life.
For as her eyes dwelt on the ruddy west,
Where the bright sun, girt round with gory clouds,
Stooped to his death, she thought upon her sire,
And of the sorrowful doom that quenched his life.
" Thus, thus," she said, within her burning heart,
" My kingly father's reign of glorious light
Was closed in blood." And as the unspoken words
Flashed silent through her being's inmost cells,
Stirring sad bitter memories of his fall,
And Arvan's cruelty, and the dread sword
Of sacrifice, which drank the crimson blood
Of him she loved, and of the altar fire
That ate his corpse, preying on his dear flesh ;
A flood of bitterness surged o'er her soul,

Blackening her brow, and dimming her dear eyes,
Lustrous, that seemed only formed for love.

There, even while the sad dream darked their light,
And steeled her to ill-deed, Queen Athreh's hand
Was on her shoulder, and her low voice spake
Claiming her aid; proffering her humble prayer.

Then Chavah, though surprised, yet instant rose
With a sweet smiling face that masked her heart
Eager for vengeance; for within her spake
A voice relentless, urging her to smite
And spare not. And she answering to it cried,
"She is o'ercome. I have deceived her soul,
Is she not given to me for a prey?
Yea! I will use her. She shall aid the slave,
Once subjected, to mar her husband's life.
And pierce with unaccustomed griefs his heart.
Then shalt thou give me rest, thou grey-haired sire,
Nor persecute me with thy blood-stained locks.
Ye weary hours of watching, fare ye well!
Oh! Father, peace; thou shalt be yet avenged."

But while she thought these thoughts, Queen Athreh
said,

"Chavah, I come to thee; despise thou not
My sorrowing prayer, nor mock my mourning life,
That supplicating seeks thy proffered aid.
Since that thou spakest, telling of the charm,
Full many an hour of conflict hath gone by:
Doubt hath laid waste my life. My heart recoiled,
Scorning the thought of winning Arvan's love,
Withheld of him, by secret magic charm.
But now I am not as in days of old.
Misfortune hath subdued me, and I seek

Gladly to hope, however faint it gleams.
For men, who in the blaze of cheerful day
Scorn the red, smoky radiance of a torch,
Yet joyous, when the night oppresses earth,
Seek guidance from the least light-giving flame.
Thou who did'st proffer aid, say, wilt thou give
To Athreh that she prayeth? All my hope
Hangs on thy lips. Could'st thou unbind the grief
That weigheth down my heart, rolling away
Its heavy burden; Chavah, I would give
All my life holds, save Arvan's love to thee."
"Athreh, I joy that thou art come to me."
I deemed that thou misdoubted'st me. The thought
Was even with me as thou enteredst in,
Filling mine heart with woe, mine eyes with tears.
Oh! Athreh, is not mine, too, saddest life
In Arvan's palace? All my joys laid low,
My father stricken by a cruel death,
My woman's love, spoil of red-handed war,
Prey of a conqueror, who scorns the prize:
Since, though it was of earth's most costly things
When unconstrained, yet, now, no longer free,
It hath lost all its olden preciousness,
Even in his eyes who hath it. Man esteems
But little that which surely is his own,
For dear the sense of conquest to his soul;
But servile things, with an' all subject will,
Whet not his appetite with pleasant strife.
Thou who did'st envy me King Arvan's love,
Know that he loved me not, as in old days
Thyself was loved: seeing I was his slave,
And he, unasking, took from me the gem

That is, ungiven if taken, wholly marred.
Thou, if my thought be true, could'st scarce believe
That I would yield to thee that thou dost prize
Above all treasure on the whole wide earth.
Athreh ! I yield thee nothing that is mine.
If Arvan's love to thee be unrestored,
Mine it can never be. Love is the bond
That linketh equal lives. Oh ! I have longed
Till all my famished heart was faint and sick,
To feel the willing clasp of tender arms
Around me once again." There Athreh took,
Won unto pity by her sweet sad plaint,
Being, of women who then walked the earth,
Most gentle-natured, easiest won by tears,
Compassion-fullest, and of tender heart,
And moved by a distress kin to her own,
Fair Chavah in her soft caressing arms ;
And sideways bent her face to kiss her mouth,
Comforting her. But Chavah raised her hand
With sudden gesture, barring from her mouth
The loveful sign's approach. Backward she shrank,
Conscious of treason, from Queen Athreh's love,
And, being false, could not endure such kiss.
" Not now, great queen," she faltered, bending low
Her head, till Athreh saw but braided hair
That crowned it with an ebon diadem.
" I, who have wronged thee, though unwillingly,
Cannot endure love-tokens from thy lips
Till I have rendered back to thee thine own ;
Then shalt thou recompense me if thou wilt."
" And thou wilt work for me the promised charm,"
Queen Athreh said, " and win me Arvan's love ?

Oh, Chavah ! if thou but fulfil thy pledge,
Then wilt thou nevermore have cause to mourn
That thou art all companionless on earth.
Myself will be thy sister throughout life,
And love thee with a love o'erpassing all
Which is a bond 'twixt sisters of one blood.
Free shalt thou be, as is a bird of the air,
That Northwards, over wilderness of sands,
And hoary oceans, and rude mountain lands,
Comes borne on fleetest pinions surely home,
When the Spring's humid winds blow freshly sweet
For thou shalt have unfettered choice of will
To seek thine Eastern land, long lost, desired,
In guerdon of thy pains. Queen Athreh's heart
Is unforgetful of her plighted word,
And will redeem her promise freely given.
Yet will thy liberty seem still a gift
Of slightest value to thy service done ;
So will she ever wait with all desire,
If haply in the years she may repay
Thy kindly act with fitting recompence.
But howsoe'er she minister, her soul,
After all gifts, all ministries of love,
Will own that Athreh is thy debtor still."

Then Chavah answered : " Athreh ! mighty queen,
Even now thou hast o'erpaid me. The delight
Of serving thee is in itself reward ;
Nor doubt I, thou wilt keep thy promised word,
Knowing thy truthfulness. Now to my task.
Learn thou : this spell most potent may be framed
Not in the sunlit hours, but when the stars,
Awakeners of love, seated in heaven,

Dispense sweet gifts unto the sons of men.
Also the clear-faced, pearl-enthronèd moon,
Framer of peace to toil-outwearied men,
Averse to hate and the wild rage of earth,
Should rule high in the azure hall of heaven,
Shedding soft silver radiance o'er the earth.
Then, by these powers propitious, we may blend
Subduing elements within the bowl,
That shall o'erpower the adamantine heart,
And soften rugged fierceness into love.
Therefore, great queen, until the midnight hour,
Watch thou apart ; but when the purple night,
Great mother of the moon and the pure stars,
Involves the heavens in shade, do thou return,
And seek out Chavah where she sits alone
Awaiting thee ; so shall thy will be wrought."

Then Athreh, with a still caress of thanks,
Clasped Chavah's hand, and silent moved away,
For she was awed at heart by her success.

So in her chamber, gazing at the sky,
Until the dewy twilight died away,
And in the growing darkness thousand stars
Relumed their silver lamps, dreaming of joy
She sat, and waited for the appointed hour.
But Chavah toiled the while with eager hands,
Collecting fit ingredients, such as men
Linked in those days with sorcery ; nor forgot
Others more deadly that might serve her end.

Then, when the moon looked from her zenith down,
Athreh, returning, found the hall prepared ;
Nor aught was there neglected that might serve
To deepen terror ; for Queen Chavah deemed,

Masked by Queen Athreh's fear, her treacherous plot
Might mock her anxious gaze, and with all ease
Shun observation. In the windowed niche,
That looked far down upon the ocean waves,
A brazen tripod stood. Thereon was placed
A silver bowl. Each from its polished sides
Flashed back the argent shining of the moon,
That, with mysterious flood of glow-worm light,
Smote full into the darkness-haunted hall,
Nor chased the gloom ; unequal to the strife
With the dark spirits of night, that clung opposed
In tapestried corners of the lengthened walls,
Or, dark-winged, lurked in the black-raftered roof.
Around the tripod, on the marble floor,
Stood, duly ranged, twelve grinning eyeless skulls,
Dank with the exhalations of the grave,
Shedding around a sickly scent of death.
Unfar was placed, ready to meet her hand,
Substance inflammable, sweet-scented wood,
Cruses of naphtha, and fire-feeding oil ;
And close beside, a heap of dead men's bones,
Slain snakes, and ghastlier reptiles, which should serve
To minister as fuel to the flames.

These things, as Athreh entered the high hall,
Greeted her sight, making her heart contract
With fear and hope. Then Chavah barred the door,
Lest eyes of strangers gazing on the work
Should mar its efficaciousness ; and stood
Once more beside the tripod. From her throat
She loosed the cloak, and gave to Athreh's hands
Its folded duskiness. White-garbed she shone,
Pure as the moon, when from a tempest cloud

Emerging, silver-white he walks the sky.
Over her shoulders soft, her loosened hair
Untressed, descended to her gleaming feet,
That, sandalless, pressing the polished floor,
Shone like twin flakes of all unstained snow
On a black pavement of clear glistening ice.
Erect beside the tripod, with white arms
Upstretched to heaven, she stood. Upon her face
Dwelt the clear moonlight, with its lustrous glow
Of deathless splendour, making plain each line
Of marvellous beauty, and revealing there
Clear written might of purpose, and the intense
Desire of heart they feel who see their hope
Long striven for accomplished. For she knew
Queen Athreh's heart, by cunning, and false words,
Entrapped at last ; seeing her watching eyes
Gleamed wild, and on her brow the silent awe
Dwelt, which they feel, who to the unseen powers
Appeal against heaven-stablished destiny.

So Chavah with her arms extended stood
Wild-waving them, low muttering the while
Words in her eastern tongue, that broken came
By modulations strange to Athreh's ears
Reft of all meaning ; but she saw therein
An adjuration to the invisible ones
To lend their awful aid, and held her breath,
Cowering in fear, deeming that though unseen
E'en now they might be nigh. Her singing closed,
Th' enchantress on the tripod woke the flame,
Feeding the naphtha-kindled lurid fire,
At intervals, with bones or reptile shape,
That crackled with ill-sound, and writhed about

Beneath the parching influence of the heat,
As though instinct with life. Lastly, she placed,
When the first fierceness of the flame had passed,
Upon the ardent coals the silver bowl,
Pouring into its lap the ruddy stream
Of fragrant wine, which yet to Athreh's eyes
Seemed a mysterious fluid, having powers
Alien from earthly substance. Then arose
Once more Chavah's sweet song ; and with her hands
She flung upon the coals sweet-scented wood,
That through the hall diffused an odorous cloud
Of silvery smoke ; and while the perfume spread,
Once and again from golden urns she poured
Wines various-tinted, mating them with that
Whose ruby wavelets sparkled in the cup.
This having done, around the tripod's base,
Within the circle of the eyeless skulls,
With deftly-glancing feet she wove a maze
Of various-figured motion, while her arms,
Consentient waving, with her feet kept time ;
And ever, as she moved in mystic dance,
She sang once more low fragments of a song,
Full of strange cadences mysterious,
Which Athreh heard with shudderings of dismay,
Seeing unpresent evil in the strains ;
Unconscious of its real deadliness,
That would lay waste her soul. Meantime the moon
Had journeying moved far o'er the hill of heaven,
And shed no more his radiance o'er the cup.
But other-whither sped. Then Chavah paused,
Exhausted, while the sweat, woke by the dance
And by the fire, poured down each wearied limb,

And dropt from off her face, lending an air
Of truthful languor, which the more deceived
The unsuspecting queen. "The spell is wrought,"
Said Chavah, "far as I can perfect now
Its magic strength. Now hie thee to thy couch,
And slumber till the uprising of the sun ;
Or watch and pray unto the pitying powers
Of mine own land, compassionate to thy woe.
For me, mine eyes to-night, unwed with sleep,
Must watch ; seeing that I must keep afar
All spirits of ill, lest they should mar my toil."

"May I not hold my vigil at thy side?"
Said Athreh. "I will bide right quietly,
Nor speak unbidden, till the dawn of day."
"It may not be," said Chavah. "See ! thou art
Without the magic circle of the skulls,
And, unprotected, mightest fall a prey
Unto the Awful Ones, who, when the moon
Withdraws his silver splendour from the hall,
Will enter, in the darkness, to destroy.
Nor is there need for Athreh's watching eyes,
Since Chavah waketh to repel all wrong
Depart—fear nothing. Lo ! I watch for thee."

So Athreh from the chamber slow withdrew,
And sought her couch, but slept not ; for her heart
Was with the magic toil disquieted.

But Chavah, having once more closed the door,
Making it sure, returned ; yet not to watch
Within the circle of the eyeless skulls
Against the evil spirits of the night,
But flung herself outwearied on her couch,
There resting till the dawning of the day.

Then to the door came a low-tapping sound,
 The which, when Chavah heard, swift she arose,
 Opening to Athreh, speaking specious words,
 Smooth with deceitfulness ; saying, " Great queen !
 Chavah hath held her promise. See, the wine,
 Love-causing, mantles brightly in the bowl,
 Waiting the final spell, that must be breathed
 In the clear daylight ; for the magic drink
 Hath now its power only in the night,
 And while the sun doth shine moves not the heart.
 Say ! dost thou will to taste the mightful cup ?
 As yet it hath no power diverse from wine,
 Which its strange-fashioned essence imitates."

There Athreh gladly took the silver bowl,
 Willing to know it free from harmful might,
 And that it could not injure Arvan's life.
 Slightly she sipped the goblet's fragrant wave
 With proving lips ; then into Chavah's hands
 Gave back, well satisfied, the shining bowl.
 " It is as wine," she said ; " naught mark I more."
 " It is as wine," replied her subtle foe,
 " Unto each proving sense. Most sensitive lips,
 Quick to discern all flavours, from the taste
 Could detect nothing. Clear, all-seeing eyes,
 Suspicious, in the ruby-tinted hue
 Would mark no alien essence. Infant lips
 Might drink of it uninjured. Yet hath it
 Most potent virtue ; and if given by thee
 To Arvan, will reclaim his truant heart.
 Now will I work for thee the closing charm,
 Crowning my toil. Then will the magic draught,
 Love-working, wait thy ministering hand."

Then once more, white arrayed, fair Chavah stood,
Flinging upon the brazier's well-fed flame
Bright-burning store of precious Eastern dust,
Mother of fragrance. Even as it fell
Upon the ardent coals, a pallid smoke
Rose dense unto the roof, veiling in clouds
The silver bowl, the tripod, and the form
Of her who stood beside it, chanting soft
Her incantation. But a moment past
Ere the smoke cleared away, and to the eye
Stood Chavah, plain revealed. But in that space,
Scarce to be measured, all the harm was wrought,
The venom mingled. Ere the snowy lids
Of Athreh's watching eyes, descending quick,
Had kissed each twice the other, unseen death,
Entering the red drink, lurked within the bowl.
For Chavah, knowing well herself concealed,
Flung swift the poison-powder in the cup
With ready hands. Then, raising them aloft,
Stood, when the smoke-cloud cleared, with lifted
palms

Of benediction. Silently she stood
An instant ; then with softest accents said,
" The wine is ready for thy husband's lips,
And the spell perfected. Now therefore bear,
When Arvan calleth for the noonday draught,
The magic potion with unfearing hands,
Winning his love once more. Only be sure
No other lips first quaff of the bright bowl,
Marring its grace ; else would another heart
Love thee, King Arvan's being filled with hate.
Such end resulteth when the spell is crost."

So Athreh with rejoicing took the cup,
Kissing the hand that gave it ; and alone
Sat in her chamber till the noontide hour,
Watching the precious draught, lest by ill chance
Strange lips might taste, and the effect be marred.
Then unto Arvan, full of loving hope,
Took she the draught that should re-win his love.

But meanwhile, Chavah, ever plotting, sent
A message to King Arvan, saying words
Danger-revealing, "Mighty king, beware.
See that thou take no wine from Athreh's hand.
Of late she hath been mingling curious draughts ;
This in thy silver cup. Means she not death ?
Now art thou warned ? Athreh seeks thy life."

Then while the warning echoed in his heart,
Queen Athreh entered, bearing in her hand
The silver cup ; for she, being the queen
Whom first King Arvan wedded, had high rank
Above all others, and to her at noon
Was it permitted to approach the king
With meat or drink prepared of her hands.

Thus came she ; but King Arvan, when he saw
Her pale face entering, suspected guilt.
Seeing it showed not as at other times,
But anxious of expression, very white ;
For that her heart within her failed for fear
As she approached the margin of her fate.

So Arvan, doubtful-eyed, upon the queen
Looked a black look, much hating her, and said,
"What evil draught is this that thou dost bring ?"
Therewith his large hand put aside the cup.

But Athreh, when King Arvan thrust away

The bowl, speaking rough words, conscious of soul
In that the magic wine mantled therein
That should restore his love, paused, fear-o'ercome,
So wordless stood ! while her sweet anxious face
Was dyèd deep in quick blood, that her shame
Had driven from its refuge in her heart
To witness her confusion. This the king
When he beheld, deemed certain proof of guilt,
And poured reproaches on her, as a cloud
Tempestuous poureth from exhaustless store
Its wealth of rain. "Traitress, thou vile of deed,
Viler of heart, wouldest thou slay thy lord,
Mingling deceitful venom in his cup ?
Tremble ! the gods have shown to me thy guilt.
Now shalt thou perish." And Queen Athreh stood
Wildered, amazed, nor had a sob to give,
Answering his injuries, for all her mind,
O'ermastered by the suddenness of change
From hope to utter blackness of despair,
Grasped not the charge. Yet at the last there dawned
The truth upon her. Then a sudden calm
Came o'er her : and her head, humbled with shame,
Was raised, and with her clear truth-telling eyes
She looked on Arvan's face ; standing again
Majestic in her olden stateliness,
Conscious of innocence within her heart,
And undeserved reproach. Then calm she spoke,
"No death unseen is lurking in the bowl,
And thou dost wrong me with thy bitter words.
How should I mingle poison in thy draught,
Loving thee, as thou knowest, but too well."
"False one," he shouted, stamping on the floor,

"Soon shall thy guilt stand forth revealed so clear,
Even thou wilt know it useless to deny."

Then to the slave who entered at his call
He spake, bidding him fetch unsodden flesh,
Which, when they brought, he soaked it in the wine,
And flung it to his hound. And the gaunt beast,
Long-haired, long-limbed, that waited on his lord
With eyes attentive, being trained of old
To take meat-morsels from his master's hand,
Sprang on the tempting spoil, with open jaws
Greedy to swallow, and devoured it straight.
But ere adown the passage of his throat
The dangerous fragment past, he on the floor
Wallowed in torment ; for the poison worked
Its will, and slew him. And King Arvan stood
Watching his favourite's death with angry eyes,
Compassionless. Then turning, faced the queen :
"Seest thou, murderess?" he thundered stern ;
"Such thine unharmed draught ! Me hadst thou slain,
Even as a dog ; but the gods, hating crime,
Revealed thy wickedness, sparing my life."

But Athreh, scarcely knowing what she said,
With a great groan of grief, appealing cried
On her whose treachery had wrought the woe.
"O Chavah !" sobbed she, nor had time to frame
One accent more ; for Arvan's wrath again
Blazed forth destroying : "Traitress ! hold thy peace,"
He said ; "thou of all women-born the worst,
Name not her name with thy polluted lips."
"Oh, Arvan ! all unwitting came the word
From out my lips, yet was it rightly said.
Lo ! Chavah knows thine accusation false.

Did she not give the cup into my hand ?
It had a spell that should restore a prize
That once was mine. If poison lurked therein,
'Tis by mischance. I mixed it not, nor she,
Seeing we drank thereof but now ourselves."

Then was King Arvan grieved at evidence
Of her untruth. " Treacherous of heart ! " he cried,
" What ! wouldest thou not only slay thy lord,
But slanderest thou who loves him and has saved ?
Know, 'twas her speech revealed thy treachery."

Thus far he spake, gazing upon her face.
But Athreh, smitten by this new deceit,
Turned deadly white, feeling herself betrayed.
And he, who saw new proof in her distress
Of deed disloyal, smit with increased rage,
Scarce knowing what he did, with sudden wrench
Drew, with o'ermastering impulse, from its sheath
The demon falchion's evil-working blade,
Meaning to smite her ; yet repented him
Ere he had ta'en a step to work his will,
Leaving the deed unwrought, plunging the blade
Once more into the scabbard. But the ill
Already had found place. The sword's dread light
Smote on her glazing eyes—and prone she fell,
Instant overthrown, even as a column falls
When the great earthquake stalks forth in its strength.
Thus fell the hapless queen. Nor need was there
Of blow from vengeful edge to quench her life.
For the revulsion warningless that came
Upon her, learning how the matter stood ;
This, and the ruin of her heart's high hope,
That failed—even as a ship with crowded sail,

That, after voyage on the stormy main,
Even in sight of the long-wished-for port,
Strikes on a hidden rock, and sinketh down
Beneath the ocean wave in sight of land—
O'ercame her gentle spirit, and she died.

CANTO VIII.

IN the high hall, a prey to lonely grief,
And to reproachful thought, King Arvan stood,
Thinking of Athreh's love, and of her end.
The stain of blood was yet upon the floor,
Where from the mouth sore smitten in the fall,
Or from some unseen injury within,
It had flowed forth ; blood that was once beloved,
Dear unto him, yea, dearer than his own,
In that its purple streams welled from a heart
Then deemed of him more precious than a throne.
And, as he gazed on it, the earlier days,
Delightful, of untarnished tenderness,
Dawned once more on his memory. Bitterly
Remembering them, he sorrowed o'er the crime
That had made death a need, and rightly deemed
Himself half guilty of her grievous sin,
Who had estranged her sweet soul by neglect,
Spurning her to mad deed through cruelty.
For now he knew her love for ever quenched,
He felt its early worth, and mourned the loss.
Even as one who hath a precious gem,
Recks little of it haply while 'tis safe ;
But when despoiling hands have seized the prize,
His heart doth blame him that he watched not more,

And o'eresteems the jewel's costly shine.
So did it chance with Arvan. On his soul,
While mute he stood, watching the stained floor,
Rose, pictured bright, the love-life he had lived
With her, who now was mere unsouled clay ;
Whilst his soul smote him sorely sparing not.

Now this the story of King Arvan's love
For dead Queen Athreh, which remembrance told.—
In youth's glad days, when undefiled delight
Pearls with its silvery dew life's emerald meads,
That heavenly fair, and unconfined as hope,
Stretch into distance blue, eluding sight ;
When every step on ground never profaned
Of mortal foot is ta'en ; 'twas then they met.
Children they were unsoiled. The dust of years
That gathers over hearts, stirred by the tread
Of journeying days that slowly pass men by,
Various in form or nature, now full pursed
And clad in gorgeous robes ; now clad in rags
And hunger-pinched, all, but like in this,
In that all bring some sorrow ; this sad dust
That hides at last the flow'rets every hue
Scarce weighed as yet upon them. Rich were they
In hopes, that wealth of childhood, which grey time,
Monarch of thieves, steals unperceived away,
Leaving old age possessionless. Full oft
The children met ; for that King Ommol's realm,
Father was he of Athreh, touched the lands
Ruled by King Arvan's sire ; and the two queens,
Mothers of Athreh and of Arvan, lived
On terms of amity. But after days
Brought severance of friendship. Arvan's sire,

Girar, deeming that Ommol wronged him sore,
Made war upon him, slaying many men.
And though new-linked at last the chain of peace,
Yet the two houses henceforth stood apart ;
Nor met the children. So the early love
Became a memory. And King Girar died.
On Arvan's head the diadem was set,
And in his hand the sceptre. So he sat
On Girar's throne, and ruled men in his stead.

Now Arvan in the morning of his days
Was mightiest of the hunters of the earth,
Scorning the reverend duties of the king,
Indifferent-hearted to his kingdom's weal,
Turning two deaf ears to his subjects' cries ;
But a great lifter of the hunting spear,
And fiercest chaser of the beasts of prey.
And on a day, toward the set of sun,
Arvan had strayed on to King Ommol's land,
And stood before the castle of the king,
Nor knew that it was Ommol's. So he blew
The great horn hanging by the castle gate,
Claiming admittance. Then the armed men
Brought Arvan before Ommol. There he shewed
His need, and how that he had lost his way,
Claiming the fire and salt. This Ommol gave,
Asking no questions. For in those far times
It was a custom still upon the earth
To reverence hospitality, and use
The stranger courteously. So Arvan sat
And ate his meat even like a beast of prey,
Unspeaking, having fasted many hours,
But Ommol gazed on him, even as men gaze

Upon a picture that doth wear the look
Of friend long-lost, thinking, who may it be?
And know the face, yet link it with no name.
Then as behind a barrier of ice,
High on the hills, from spring's dissolving snows
The waters slowly gather, till their weight
Snaps the strong bar, and sweeps it down the vale;
So rose the memories, waxing yet more strong,
Till their collected might o'erpowered the doubt
In Ommol's mind. Then with loud voice he cried,
"Art thou not Girar's son?" And Arvan raised
His head, and laid his well-greased dagger down,
Then said, "Thou speakest truly—I am he."

Now as things, hidden by the veil of night,
Stand evident beneath some meteor's gleam,
So Arvan's warrior presence and brave smile
Lit the dark past, bringing lost days to mind,
And Ommol, being old, was glad of heart,
Gazing again on dear delights of youth,
Meeting his ancient comrade in his son.
Therefore he, holding out his scarlet cloak,
Said, "Son of Girar, Girar was my friend,
Thou therefore take to thee my royal cloak,
And let peace be between us." Arvan said,
"Be it so. As our realms stand breast to breast,
So be their lords united evermore."

Then Arvan gave the king his golden belt,
Cunningly worked, and set with many gems,
In token of his friendship; and they sat,
Meat being ended, till the midnight hour.
For Ommol dwelt upon his days of youth
Gladly; and knew much lore of former days;

Showing how he and Arvan's mighty sire
Had hunted, in the green primeval woods,
The mountain-beast, huge-bodied, ivory-tusked,
Quelling his pride : and of the former wars
That desolated earth, when earth was young.
And Arvan heard these things with willing ears,
Being a hunter ; eager too in war.
Yet, at the last, he, weary with the chase,
And lulled by Ommol's everflowing speech,
Which welled forth from the cavern of his mouth,
Copious, monotonous as a mountain stream,
That bubbles drowsy from a hollowed cliff,
Closed his great eyes and slept. This Ommol marked,
Then smote with brawny fist the oaken board,
Bidding them bring the guest-cup. Which they brought.
And Arvan drank thereof. Then Ommol rose,
Taking a torch, and led himself the way
Unto the sleep-room. There he left the king.
And Arvan on a mighty pile of skins
Outstretched, a pleasant couch for weary man,
Flung his great limbs, and slept like a still sea
That slumbers silent 'neath the midnight sky,
So hushed, no snore of waves vexes the air,
Where it lies godlike in its glorious bed.

So slumbered Arvan, vacant of all dreams.
But when the glowing sun rose o'er the hills,
Great rival of the silver-shining moon,
That wanes and fails before his fiery gaze,
Even as a monarch overthrown in war
In presence of his victor, Arvan woke,
For the red rays smote right into the room
Through windows open to the sky and wind,

For that men deemed it yet effeminate
With hanging hides to fence sleep from the cold.
So rising from his couch, he shook himself
Like a great wolf-hound, and across the room
Strode to the window, greeting the bright Sun
With praise and supplication. Next he gazed
With well-pleased eyes over a pleasaunce fair,
A land of lawns, o'erpearled with morning dew.
There on the bright turf, flitting to and fro,
Even like a golden-wingèd butterfly,
He saw a maiden greatly beautiful,
Her glorious face clasped round with golden hair
Like morning star circled by sunrise clouds.
And, as he gazed upon her lovely face,
Childhood's lost days came back upon his mind,
White-robed, soft-smiling with delight of youth.
'Twas with him as with one who dreams a dream,
Passingly pleasant, losing it awhile
In the fierce strivings of the busy day
Till some sweet smile, linked with the visioned world,
Flashes its long-lost beauty on the brain ;
Then waxing fair again it stands confest,
New perfecting its vanished loveliness.

So Arvan stood, gazing upon the maid,
And in his heart he said, " Who may it be ?
Can it be Athreh ? Surely it is she.
How hath she grown most fair ? " There stood he still,
Watching her graceful movements as she went,
Unconscious of his presence, to and fro,
Even as a folded snake, hidden in shade,
Watches the flutterings of some beauteous bird
That it would fain devour. With eager eyes

He looked unsated on her graceful form,
And as he gazed ever his wonder rose
That earth had aught so fair. Thereon upsprang
A mighty longing in his warrior heart
To fold her in his arms, and call her his ;
Nor could he feast his eyes sufficiently
On her bright beauty. So when she had past
Behind some leafy thicket's verdant screen,
He felt deserted ; even as a man
Who with adoring eyes looks to the moon,
When the bright god hath slipt behind a cloud.
Then, driven by the hunger of his heart,
He searched the garden, where his eyes' delight
Had lately shone, seeking her everywhere ;
But she had fled. So he, with grievèd mind,
Unused to patience, turning, sought the hall.
Therein, he entering, found his vision bright,
His garden queen, Athreh, for it was she.

Behind the grey, gaunt vastness of her sire,
Clinging to him, as clings a delicate rose
To a grey, time-worn tower, Athreh stood ;
Her gentle eyes bent earthwards modestly ;
For she was shyer than a desert fawn,
Or that frail tree, whose timid foliage shuns
Self-folding mortal touch. But Arvan had
Scant time to notice, for King Ommol spake,
With a loud laugh of welcome, that rang forth
Its noiseful greeting ; from the walls and roof
Redoubling, even as a thunder-peal,
In mountain-lands, from many a precipice,
Black-fronted, grassless, buffeted back resounds :
“ Welcome, King Arvan, Girar's son ! ” he said.

“What ! hast thou women-friends o’er all the lands ?

Lo ! here is one who saith she knows thee well.”

And there on Athreh’s shoulder weighed his hand.

“What, Athreh ! art thou shamed ? Can’st thou not speak ?

Nay ! look thou up on Arvan. Welcome him.

See ! ’tis a warrior, not a beast of prey,”

There to himself he laughèd self-applause.

Then Athreh, lifting up the snowy veil

Of drooping eyelids from her sapphire eyes,

Shed from their blue depths peace on Arvan’s heart,

Smiling shy welcome. Thus far went the dream,

Grieving his heart with olden memories.

Then it was broken ; for fair Chavah came,—

It being the hour when she should seek the king.

Entering, she stood, and saw his pain of heart.

But Arvan, being greatly vexed in soul,—

Linking her fair face with the present woe,

In that her warning had shown Athreh’s guilt,—

Said, being all forgetful of the hour,

“Thou com’st unbidden. I would be alone.”

Then seeing he was greatly grieved at heart,

Crossing the hall, she knelt her straightway down,

Gazing on him, with eyes suffused with tears,

Appealingly, for she could weep at will ;

While her lips quivered like a little child’s,

That is rebuked, and yet refrains from sobs,

Being o’er-terrified. And the great king,

Moved by her face, forgetful of the past,

Now that she was beside him, spake again :

“Chavah ! the queen ! why weepest thou salt tears ?”

And she in a low voice sob-broken said :

"I weep, for thou art cruel. Thou dost scorn
Me, who but now have saved thy soul from death."
Thereon she buried in her shapely hands
Her face, and all her body shook with sobs.

But Arvan, looking on her, felt remorse,
He having spoken harshly ; for he knew
Not hers the sin that Athreh's heart was false ;
And that the timely warning profited,
Saving him, all-unwitting, from his doom.
Then spake he kindly to her : "Sorrow not,"
Said he ; "'Twas but my agony of heart
That spake rough words to thee. I love thee well ;
Yea, and am grateful for thy service done."

This when she heard, fair Chavah raised her head,
And showed her tearful face, and looked her love.
But Arvan raised her gently from the ground,
And spake full kindly to her, comforting her ;
Deeming that he had greatly grieved her heart.

Now when the gloom had vanished from her brow,
Even like a storm-cloud from a snow-crowned hill,
King Arvan spake with her of what had chanced.
"Seest thou," he said, "the stain upon the floor ?
It is Queen Athreh's life-blood. She is not."

Then Chavah answered : "Men's lips brought report
That some mischance had happed unto the queen.
How came this thing to pass ? Did she confess
Her guilt, and thou destroy her with the sword ?"

And he replied : "I drew the sword to smite,
Yet struck her not. But when she saw its light,
Whether its dreaded might oppressed her soul,
Slaying ; or her own fear and conscious heart
Destroyed, I know not ; but she fell and died."

Then Chavah answered : “ Fitly was she slain,
Having conspired to take away thy life.
But thou, oh king ! arise ; forget the past,
And let her dwell with unremembered things.
Know thou, a mighty king should bear a heart
Strong to resist the blows of mortal fate.
But if thou grieve, drink thou the blood-red wine,
For it is good, and comforts much the heart.
Then shall thy pain pass from thee, and thy life,
When thou awakest, shall again be whole.”

Now Arvan lovèd much the blood-red wine,
And drank deep draughts, even as a conqueror doth.
Therefore he heard the counsel of the queen
Gladly, he knowing that 'twas meet and wise.
So to the slaves he spake, that they should bring
The mightiest bowl, and also urns of wine,
That he might drink him drunk, delaying not.
And Chavah poured for him exceeding draughts
Of fiery grape-juice, till his heart was glad,
And his eyes heavy with approaching sleep,
The wine-gods' gracious gift. Then flung he straight
His giant-form upon the skin-heaped couch,
There slumbering till the dawning of the day.
Thus did he, and forgot his pain of heart.
And from that hour, full oft at eventide,
He drank deep wine-draughts, craving pleasant sleep,
So that he might, in the still land of rest,
Escape the impatient gnawings of his heart.
This thing fair Chavah knowing, framed a plot,
Wily of heart, to mine King Arvan's power,
Robbing him when he slept of the charmed sword.
Thus then she said within her thoughtful heart :

“Lo! Arvan drinketh deep. Soon as the eve
Comes round with pearly wings, giver of peace
To guiltless men, he, stung by vain remorse,
Seeketh to quench his pain in fiery draughts
Of potent dew, pressed from the purple fruit
That bends to earth the tresses of the vine.
Shall I not tempt him when the night returns,
And the still hours bring back heart agonies
With yearnings vain for rest? Yea! I will come
With the red drink he loveth, filled with fire,
Strong with quick life, divinest gift of gods;
Then shall he drink it, and his heart be glad,
Unknowing of his doom. Soon as he sleeps,
I will arise and steal the charmed sword,
Conveying it into a secret place;
Then shall his power be broken, and he fall.”

Now Arvan's palace stretched along the shore;
The mighty ocean, with its countless waves,
Beat on its rearward face; and from the walls
Full many a windowed opening watched the main.
And Arvan slept of custom in a hall,
Whose windows looked upon the hoary sea;
For much he loved the tumult of the waves,
And their low thunder on the rocky shore,
Deeming it gave great depth to his repose.
Also it was established that the queen,
Who should be sharer in the royal couch,
Came, being summoned, at the eventide;
And Chavah often came, she being loved.

So, being wise, she in her heart took thought,
Then sent for Lygrul, showing him her soul.
“Lygrul, King Arvan drinketh blood-red wine

Deeply as doth a conqueror. He doth sleep,
Soon as the night returns, as sleep the dead.
Surely to-night I seek him in his hall.
Shall he not slumber, sleeping on his couch,
Having no fear, drunk with the draught divine ?
Then will I steal the sword, and quench his power.
Now therefore rise, and let thy heart be strong ;
Lurk thou beneath the palace in a boat,
Till in the window thou dost mark a torch,
Held in my hand, fling its red radiance down
On the salt ocean stream. Then haste with speed
Awaiting me. Know I will come to thee
Escaping Arvan's chain. Thou, watch thou well ;
Be thou all eyes, all hands ; forbear to breathe,
For I will surely come, delaying not ;
Also I give the falchion to thy hand."—

Swift came the dewy eve, giver of rest ;
And Arvan slumbered on fair Chavah's knees
Thoughtless of treachery. But Chavah waked,
Pondering upon her plot, weaving his doom.
Yet, as she gazed upon his warrior face,
Girt round with tresses of long yellow hair—
Even as a sea-rock, overwashed with tides,
Is fringed with shaggy locks of ocean wrack—
She, moved in spirit by the mighty face
Of him she sought to slay, grew weak at heart,
And half relented. Then across her soul
Swept, like a desert breath of fiery wind
From wasted lands, out of her scathed past,
The memory of her wrongs and of her sire ;
And the fair flower of mercy, that began
To put forth tender blossoms, drooped and died,

Seared by the fiery anguish of her grief.
Then her face changed. Her eyes flashing wild flame,
Her mouth firm clenched in passionate resolve,
Gently from off her knees with tender care
She moved the king's head, as a mother moves
Her child that slumbers sweetly on her knees,
Intent to lay it in its cradle nest,
Breaking not its sweet sleep. Soon she arose.
From off the couch's head she took the sword,
And moved towards the window with the torch,
Calm as the heaven-sent Fate that slayeth men,
When on its earthward path it moveth down,
Fulfiller of the dread will of the gods.
There, by the torch's light, she marked the boat
With oars, suspended like a prey-bird's wings,
Outspread, unmoving when it sees a prey.
Then did she make her ready for the flight,
Binding the rope unto a columned shaft,
That, being one of many, on its head
Sustained the golden-shining chamber's roof.
Thereafter she prepared her for the way,
Venturous, through paths of air, that should lead down
Her and the charmed sword to Lygrul's skiff.
But as she stood, the king, haply disturbed
By an ill-dream, or that his head low placed
Upon the couch, consorted not with rest ;
Or haply warned of his approaching fate
By an o'erwatching spirit, deeply groaned.
So Chavah, fearing least the king should wake,
Flung down the fatal falchion hastily,
Lest he arising should perceive her plot,
Possessing him again of her fair prize.

Far whirled, revolved the great sword through the air,
Then, by mischance, glancing against the boat,
It plunged into the main. Thereat she cried
A short sharp cry of rage, when she beheld
Made vain the thought and courage of her heart.
But Lygrul and his crew, with sudden oars, '
Struck the salt flood, and vanished in the gloom,

Then Arvan oped his eyes, waked by the cry
That had escaped from Chavah's labouring breast.
Gazing around, he marked her where she stood,
And called unto her, and she, white as death,
Turned facing him ; but when he saw her eyes
He deemed some treason nigh, for they gleamed wild
And fierce as a wild beast's when driven to bay.
"Chavah," he said, "why gazest thou on me
With troubled eyes of fire? Why dost thou stand
White-cheeked and mute? What, is there danger near,
Which thou dost know of, hidden from my soul?"

Swift his right hand grasped round to find the sword ;
Then first he found the loss. A moment dumb
He sat, his soul astonished at the change,
Sudden he sprang at her. "Thou too," he cried,
"Leagued art thou then with those that seek my fall?"
And as he spake, fiercely he grasped her wrist,
Till the blood spirted from the broken flesh,
Bruised, though he knew it not, beneath his hand.

But Chavah stood and looked upon her lord,
With a cold laughter in her dauntless eyes,
"Thou spakest truth," she said. "Lost is the sword ;
Thou art as other men, thy guard is gone.
Summon thy courage now, oh ! soul of war,
If haply thou may'st burst the twisted snare,

Which woman's hands have woven round thy life.
Yet shall'thou perish, even as the men,
Whom thou, oppressing greatly, hast destroyed,
And thy dread fall shall glad in death my heart."

Arvan replied, "Thou deemest that my love
Will surely spare thee, saving thee from death.
Yet is thy hope false, even as thy heart ;
For know, oh, Chavah ! thou shalt surely die."

And Chavah smiled a smile of great disdain,
"Threaten," she said, "thy slaves, oh, king ! with death
Haply they cling to life, and grieve to die,
Death unto me is welcome, as the close
Of dewy eve to some worn labourer,
Outwearied by the toil of the hot day.
Power thou may'st have over the meaner herd,
Vain is thy might against the freeborn soul."

Thus said she taunting him, she scorning death.
But Arvan turning, looked on her a look,
She ne'er had seen in those large eyes before,
Smiting her into silence. Then he called
Loud-voiced upon the guard, bidding him fetch
Lygrul, the captain, with exceeding speed,
Who summoned came ; for he had sought his home
Soon as the sword glanced wide, hoping to shun
Discovery of guilt. So Arvan spake,
Telling him of her sin, and of her doom.

Now, in the northern land it was the law,
'Stablished and settled from the elder times,
That whosoe'er conspired against the king,
Meaning to slay him, being of his house,
Should by the heels, bound to an untamed horse,
Be dragged over the waste of stony plains,

Till every limb gashed by the jagged rocks,
And the fair flesh-robe full of grievous rents,
The life should fail, and the soul seek the shades.
And this they did, well knowing that the king
Should wear on earth inviolate majesty,
Fenced from the attempts of fierce, conspiring hands.
But Arvan could not bear to think the head,
Bright, beautiful, which on his breast had lain,
Should be profaned, dragged through defiling dust,
Crownless, and stript of love, a scorn of men.
Nor could he brook the thought that her dear limbs,
All rent and bruised by the avenging rocks,
Leaving long stains of gore where'er they past,
Should be a scoff to outcasts of the earth.
So unto Lygrul, dooming her, he said,
"Lygrul, let her not be a public scorn.
Albeit she hath sinned, and just the law,
Yet once she was the glory of my soul.
Take her away, and smite her suddenly,
And let her name cease henceforth from the earth."

Thereon, on Chavah, Lygrul laid his hand,
To lead her forth, fulfilling Arvan's word.
But she, well knowing that her hour was come,
Nor hoping refuge from her imminent doom,
Stood facing Arvan fearlessly ; then spake,
"The time is come to me, and I must die ;
Yet comes not death too soon ; for I have wrought,
Arvan, thy ruin. Sweet is my revenge,
Sure is thy doom. King, thou hast lost the sword ;
Soon shall the empire follow. One thing more
I show thee ere I pass. The tale I spake
Of Athreh's plot was false. She loved thee well,

Nor did she ever seek to take thy life.

Know that I placed the poison in thy cup."

And Arvan answered, "Heart fulfilled with guile!
Could'st thou not wreak thy vengeance upon me.
Sure the death-dealing viper hath no fang
Poisonous as thy false tongue. How could'st thou slay
Athreh, yet know her guiltless?" Chavah said,
"Arvan, most hateful of the sons of men!
Thou who didst mock my agony of heart!
I slew her that I might rejoice in thine.
Now am I glad; for I have heard thy groans.
Yea! and all comforted I go to death,
Knowing that, in great bitterness of soul,
Thou too shalt surely seek death, yet not find."

But Arvan, speechless with exceeding grief,
Signed unto Lygrul; and he led her forth,
Meaning to smite her, honouring Arvan's word.

Now, as they went unto the slaughter-place,
Where men were smitten as the law adjudged,
Or the king's word decreed, Chavah, who hoped
Even yet escape, though in the clutch of fate,
Knowing her beauty's power, and Lygrul's love,
Said, "Lygrul, whither lead'st thou me away?"

Who answered, "Hence unto the slaughter-place.
There must thou die, even as the king decreed."

Then Chavah, "Said the king where I should die?"
"He said thou should'st be slain, showing not where,"
Lygrul replied. But she, "I am a queen.
Should such as I perish as do the vile.
He said, 'Let her not be a public scorn.'
If thou must slay me, smite me in thy hall:
So shall my soul have rest." Thus spake her lips,

While on his face dwelt her imploring eyes,
Full of deep meaning. And a sudden hope
Flashed upon Lygrul, that she yet might live,
Escaping doom, seeing that she was wise,
Crafty in plotting ; for he loved her much,
And in her blood had dipt the avenging steel
Unwillingly. Thus when they stood before
The portal of his palace, Lygrul said,
“It is the king’s command that she should die
Alone within the hall. Keep watch below.”

So Lygrul and Queen Chavah sought the hall :
Then on her knees sank Chavah suppliantly,
Crying unto him with entreating voice,
“Oh ! spare me, spare me, Lygrul. Thou hast loved—
Thou canst not sure destroy me. Even yet,
If thou wilt aid me, I may be thine own.
Spurn me not hence to death.” And as she spake,
Upon his arm she laid her delicate hand,
Looking with supplication on his face.

But he, moved by her beauty, yet replied,
Though answering more his doubting heart than her,
“How can I spare thee, losing not my life !
Art thou not watched by Arvan’s armed men,
Doomed to quick death. If I despise his word,
Seeking to save, know thou a thousand swords
Would stay our flight, deep dipping in our gore.
Or should I but refuse to work his will,
The king’s, who doth command, I should be slain,
Hewn piecemeal limb from limb ; such death of shame
Waits mutinous men. Chavah, thou too would’st fall.”
“Not so,” she said, “Oh ! hearken. Thou shalt be
Yet strong to save ; nor shalt thy blood be spilt.

This shalt thou do, oh, Lygrul! Take a slave,
Black-haired and tall of stature, like to me,
Put thou upon her these my queenly robes,
Then smite her that she die. This having done,
Veil thou her face, and summon in the guard,
Showing her to them. They are gross of heart,
Lightly to be deceived. Thou art their chief.
How should they deem thee false to Arvan's word?
Thus shalt thou save me, Lygrul, loving me,
So shall I be thine own through after days."

Then Lygrul, hearkening to her words, obeyed.
He hid fair Chavah in a secret place;
Then chose him out a slave, black-haired and tall,
Like unto Chavah, and he placed on her
The queenly robe, and on her head he set
The jewelled circlet, badge of royalty,
Then with his sword he smote her that she died.

But when the last faint quiver from the limbs
Waned to death-stillness, he concealed the face,
Hiding the features, and he oped the door,
Summoning with loud voice King Arvan's guard.

So the dark warriors trooped into the hall
With mighty clash of brazen-sandalled feet,
Trampling the marble floor. Then stood around
In awèd silence, gazing on the corpse
Which they supposed the queen's. But Lygrul spake,
"King Arvan hath commanded, and his word
Hath touched on swift fulfilment. She is dead
Who did conspire against the kingly throne.
So perish traitors." And the warriors past,
Having beheld the body, as was meet,
Each to his place. But Lygrul took the robe,

Stained with much blood, also the jewelled crown
And armlets, and he covered from men's eyes
The body, cloaking it with anxious care ;
Then, placing it upon a swift-oared boat,
With his own hands he gave it to the deep.

But afterwards he turned upon his steps,
Seeking the palace. There he found the king
Mourning, with eyes robbed of their wonted fire,
And all his face unmoving as a stone,
For that the double treachery stung his soul.
At last he felt a presence in the room,
Then looked he on Lygrul with dim eyes,
And spake unto him with a hollow voice.
“ Chavah, the Eastern captive—is she dead ? ”
But Lygrul answered, “ Arvan, she is dead ;
And lo ! I bring the tokens of her end.”

Thus speaking, he spread out the blood-stained robe,
Witness of death, before the monarch's face.
But Arvan turned aside his weary eyes,
Loathing to see it, for he loved her much,
Nor answering spake he of her word again.
So Lygrul, turning, went upon his way,
And left the monarch to his grief of heart.

CANTO IX.

LYGRUL with Chavah sat, and communèd
Of dangers past, and of life's future way,
Yet gloom-enshrouded, and heart-hopes and fears.

Then thus fair Chavah spake, "While Arvan lives,
Reigning o'er sons of men, our hold on life
Is more unsure than is the mountaineer's,
Who, grasping at some branch to break his fall,
Hangs o'er the black abyss, while the frail bough
Breaks 'neath his pendent weight from the grey stem.
Men's eyes are round the great ; in every place
Spying out secret things they fain would hide.
If haply some one in the after days
Perceive my face, Arvan yet being king,
Surely thy life were forfeit. Therefore come
Let us achieve his ruin ; for who leave
The work half done win not divine reward,
Being despised both of gods and men ;
But they who, patient as keen-scented hounds,
Pursuing some horned inmate of the woods,
Follow the flying footsteps of success,
Unchecked by fear or failure, surely win ;
For the strong-hearted are beloved of heaven."

And Lygrul said, "Thy soul's eyes are more keen
To see in clouded hours the onward path,

Than are man's duller orbs ; for women still
Are quicker to work evil, and their heart
Is by the awful Powers that rule above
Fashioned to compass treachery. Oh ! thou,
Who in wise lying dost surpass thy sex,
As in deceit, beloved of the gods
Who gave unto thee powers beyond thy race,
Show me thy thought, laying a prudent plot."

Then Chavah spake, " In the blue ocean depths
Lieth the sword, safe mantled from men's gaze,
In the dark folded garment of the sea.
Are there not men who with the god are friends ?
Who pass beneath the fencings of his cloak,
Winning the treasures that adorn his breast.
In mine own country there were dusk-limbed slaves,
Who told strange stories of the ocean world,
Of wonders seen and dangers dared beneath
The awful waste of the wave-roughened sea.
Such men seek out, using thine utmost speed—
For unnamed dangers lurk in all delay—
Let them search well, for we must have the sword."

But Lygrul said, " I deemed thou didst despise
The magic falchion and its demon power.
Whence comes the change over thy steadfast soul."

And Chavah answered, " I beheld his eyes
When he believed the falchion wholly lost,
And having seen, I know the word is true,
Which men, much babbling, tell of the dread
sword :

Else wherefore was the king exceeding wroth,
Even to madness, when he marked the theft.
Now therefore there is virtue in the blade ;

Hence came the white glare of his evil rage,
For that he knoweth well the falchion's might."

Thus spake she, trusting now herself its force,
Seeing that Arvan's anger, being great,
Had woke in her faith, in the people's tale.

Then he, "The sword lieth beneath the wall
Of Arvan's royal palace. Watching eyes
View the broad main through the clear hours of day.
We may not seek it while the sun from heaven
Looks all-revealing. Though I marked the spot
Where the sword plunged beneath the ocean stream,
Yet scarcely deem I that the eyes of men
Would find it 'neath the night involved waves."

Then Chavah answered, "Did'st thou not perceive ?
Or was it that my fearing eyes saw false,
Filled with the terror of discovery ?
But surely, Lygrul, strange unwonted light
Seemed unto me forth flashing from the glaive.
Either the torch-light blazed along the hilt
With more than wonted fire ; or else it sheds
Even as men say from out its air-clear depths,
By its own virtue strange mysterious light,
Or haply the bright sword, the demon's gift,
Was in the fall half shaken from the sheath ;
For as it fell a glare smote on mine eye,
Such as, thou sayest, in battle, from its blade
Is shed over the hosts of warring men.
It may be, resting 'neath the ocean wave,
It spreads effulgence round. Yet if in vain
Men search at first, spending the anxious hours
Idly, know thou, we shall some other way
Discover that may compass our desire."

So Lygrul did even as Chavah said.
He sought him many slaves, cunning to win,
With oaring hands and feet, their way beneath
The glistening surface of the ancient sea.
And when the night fell deep, involving earth
And sea in gloom, he, in a swift-oared boat,
Sought out the place beneath the palace wall
Where he had tarried, waiting for the sword ;
Also with him went those, of whom he spake,
When he with Chavah plotting laid the snare
That should destroy King Arvan, whom they loathed ;
Hercar and Zular, chieftains strong of heart,
Though vanquished once on the red battle-field,
Whereon at times brave men are stricken down,
Not shunning death, yet doomed to wear the chain,
Being made captive, set apart to bear
The victor's scorn, in sad captivity.
Beside them sat southern, and eastern slaves,
Some bought of Lygrul, with a price of gold
Exceeding great, and others ta'en in war ;
All strongly-muscled, and well skilled to win
Their way far down into the azure main,
And bring back treasures from its secret caves.

Now when the rowing men, the station gained,
Ceased from their work, at sudden signal given
By Lygrul, he unto the diver-men,
The slaves, opening his mouth, spake warning words,
Instructing them, showing their present task,
And of reward if perfected, and pain
Not to be shunned if failure were their fate.
"Slaves," said he, quietly, "beneath the waves
Lieth a sword. On it I set great store,

Seeing 'twas won in war, and of all blades
Was cunningest to break the warrior's shield,
Reaching his breast through steel and tripled hide.
Search, therefore, in the waters, where it lies
Hugged in their watery clasp, and give it back
Unto its rightful owner's hand once more.
Not hard I deem the task, for in the hilt
Shineth a diamond stone, whose lustrous glow
Shall guide you to your prey, even as a worm,
Shedder of light, by its own radiant beam
Reveals its resting-place. If ye succeed,
Winning it, ye shall have great store of gold
And freedom ; for my own hands from your limbs
Shall strike the chains. Therefore, be strong and brave,
Doing your utmost to secure the prize.
Do not your lives depend upon your skill ?
For failing in your task, ye surely die."

Then bared the slaves their limbs to face the sea,
Daring its hidden depths. Soon, all unclad,
Along the margin of the skiff close ranged
They waited Lygrul's signal. A black line
Of spectral shapes, they showed against the gloom
Mysterious, dim, of the de-lighted sea,
Involved so far in shadow of the night,
No eye could trace the outline of their form ;
But a dull blot of blackness in the gloom
Revealed their presence. Then commanding, spake
Lygrul again, "Arok, thine arms are strong,
And thy heart valiant to attempt the deep ;
Prove thou the dangers, that beneath the main
Lurk in the sea-caves, first." Then Arok sprang,
Wordless, with palms high joined above his head,

Precipitate into the glassy wave.

And an expectant silence sank o'er all

The inmates of the boat, doubting what fruit

Should follow on the unseen adventurous toil.

Now Arok was a child of the grey sea,

Who, even from infancy, with dusky arms

Had cloven the clear waves of the eastern deep.

And as years came, adding increase of strength,

He won high fame among the diver-men,

Seeking, below the glistening sun-lit wave,

The ruddy rock that groweth 'neath the main

In branching forests. And upon a day,

As through the watery world he bent his path,

A mighty monster, inmate of the deep,

Sent by some sea-god, jealous that a man

Should view the sacred wonders of the sea,

With yawning mouth, all greedy to devour,

Cleaving the yielding crystal, swift of speed,

Essayed to slay him. Then great Arok turned,

Being a stalwart diver, brave of heart,

And, with his two hands in the tawny sand,

He burrowed, flinging round a yellow cloud

That blurred the shining wave, hiding his shape.

But the great fish paused, dubious ; for he saw

The gods of air had to his enemy

Given greater wisdom. Even as he paused,

With doubtful eyes, not daring to advance,

Arok, his dagger drawn, burst from the cloud,

And smote him fiercely through his silver mail,

So that blood flowed, and the great sea-beast died.

Therefore he was by all the ocean sons

Much honoured, being free till Arvan came.

Then, his land conquered, he became a slave.
Him Lygrul purchased with a worthy price,
Even a thousand pieces of red gold.

Now, underneath the surface of the deep
He wended slowly, with quick-watching eyes,
Prying into the secrets of the sea.
Yet nowhere met his eye the magic gleam,
Betokener of the presence of the sword.
Still, with held breath pent in his swollen breast,
He oared his way over the weed-veiled rocks,
Whereon the mighty ocean slumbered calm.
While thus he, with persistent strength, far down
Beneath the water, toiled to win the glaive,
Within the skiff was silence, for each man
Felt Arok's venture as it were his own.

The ripples, waked by the slave's lightning plunge,
Had died from out the waters slow away ;
Men on the boat's edge gathered ; eyes and ears
Strained with such eagerness, they all forgot
They looked or listened. And the stillness grew ;
Each man holding his breath, as though he were
Himself the diver. On the palace walls,
Through the dead silence, one could hear the chime
Of tiny waves, that beat with little hands
On the unyielding granite. Last there came
A sound of severed waters, a long snort
Of indrawn breath ; and in the boat a cry,
The cry of many voices suddenly
Hushed by remembering fears. And Arok swam
Beside the boat once more, panting sharp breaths,
Exhausted by the effort made in vain,
For his great hands were swordless. As he climbed

Into the boat, Lygrul's low voice again
Spoke, summoning anew to strenuous toil :
" Rhad, thou art envious of Arok's fame,
Seek thou the sword which hath escaped his gaze.
Winning it, thou shalt have great store of gold,
And freedom, and a name that shall not die."

Thus spake he, stirring up the emulous fire
In the sea-diver's breast ; for he had been
Long jealous of grey Arok's high renown,
Seeing that in his land he had a fame,
Second to none among the ocean men.
He had been nourished in his morn of life
On a fair isle, far in the inland sea.
Fair was the land, mother of mighty men,
All bold to face the deep, either with ships
Cleaving the rugged surface of the deep,
Or winning from the ocean hoarded wealth,
The tree-like crimson stone, or silver shell.
And thus they lived in plenty and content ;
Their hardy island hearts keeping afar
All peril of conquest. They were strong and free ;
And stately towns arose upon the shore,
Temples and palaces. But Arvan's star
Arose above the waters of the deep,
Filling the nations with distress and fear.
His ships came swiftly gliding o'er the wave,
Like a great shoal of sea-beasts numberless ;
And all the island was laid waste by war.
Alone the capital, girt round with walls,
Secure with enginry, and guarded well
By men who scorned to yield, yet faced the fray,
Though all its turreted sisters of the coast

Mourned low in ashes ; for men hoped relief
From the sea-nations of the black-raced lands.
But Arvan's fleets lay anchored on the main ;
The while his hosts, encamped along the shores,
Watched that no man might fly, seeing he sought
To hunger down the city's haughty strength,
And break its heart of pride. Then did men fear
Within the walls, lest famine should prevail
Ere the swart nations, in their ruddy ships,
Should come to rescue. So they sought them out
A man having sea-knowledge, resolute,
Faithful and strong of heart, as messenger.
Him they sent forth, with supplicating words,
Unto the dusky children of the South,
Praying for speedy succour, showing all
Their perilous need, bidding them come with haste,
For that the city tottered to her fall.
Then Rhad, beneath the vessels of the fleet,
Wended his way through the grey, watery world,
Bearing the message ; and again returned.
And after this, oftimes he went again ;
But at the last, o'erbold with much success,
He was made captive. And the city fell ;
For the swart nations feared to draw the sword,
Knowing King Arvan's might. Then the king slew
The old and feeble ; but he spared the young,
The women and the men, making them slaves.
Then was Rhad's story known ; so he became
A slave of price, and served the pitiless king.—
Now, when beneath the waters of the deep
Rhad plunged, his ready limbs obeying swift
Great Lygrul's word, a silence as of death

Sank on the watchers in the wave-rocked boat ;
While men's lips, tight compressed, spoke of the fear
Fast rising in their hearts ; for well they knew
Lygrul would loose his pledge, quenching their lives,
If the sought sword escaped their searching eyes.
So anxious stood they on the vessels marge,
In the great stillness one could hear each breath
Drawn by the watchers, and low chiming came
Once more the murmur of the rippling wave
Breaking upon the walls. A moment past,
Another and another ; and men thought
" Some sea-beast has devoured him 'neath the waves,
Night-roamer through the deep, with gaping jaws
Seeking a prey ; he comes not back again.
Surely it doth surpass the might of man
Thus long to tarry 'neath the purple sea,
Barred from the wonted use of pleasant air.
Last, as their souls stood on the edge of hope,
Again the rush of waters met the ear ;
Then the long lengthened snort of indrawn breath.
And to the boat's edge clung Rhad's sinewy hands ;
Yet was he too much spent with desperate toil,
To draw him up out of the sea again.
But by the hair and arms full many slaves
Caught him, and drew him gasping from the wave
Into the boat. Panting and spent he lay
Like to an ocean fish but newly caught.
Then rising on one hand 'twixt the short pants
Of sharp drawn breath, he said, " Great Lygrul hear !
As o'er the weed-heaped couch of the deep sea
I oared my way ; after long painful search,
Sudden a dim light gleamed upon mine eyes,

Whether it came from some bright shining child
Of the salt deep ; or whether from the sword,
The paly lustre, this I know not well ;
For as I drew toward the silver light
Through the dull gloom, I saw an awful shape
Slowly approaching, indistinct in form,
With outstretched arms that slowly waved me back.
There my heart sank with terror, and methought
“ This is a sea-god, ruler of the main,
Who guards his treasures from the hands of men.”

He spake ; then Lygrul answered, “ Diver-man !
Thou hast but seen the shadow of thy fear.
Did'st thou not say the ocean floor was strewn
With sea-wrack ? Pendulous from some black rock,
Haply upon the briny stream beneath
It waved long arms solemnly to and fro.
This hath thy vain heart looked on as a god.
Or if not this ; yet 'tis an ocean fish
Ungainly, of strange form, such as are nursed
In the cold slimy bosom of the deep :
Him hast thou met with in the under world,
Thus frightened from all glory and reward ;
Being unequal, Rhad, to win renown.”
Bedak ! the waters lie before thy face.
Win thou the prize where Rhad and Arok failed.

But Bedak motionless on the boat's edge,
Stood wrapt in silence ; for he feared the plunge,
Unknowing what grim shape waited below,
Ready to clasp him in its awful arms.

Then Lygrul spake again, “ Why dost thou pause ?
Have I not spoken ? ” Bedak answered him
With chattering teeth and shiver cold of fear,

“ Oh ! great my lord, my heart is cold with dread,
Hearing Rhad’s awful tale. This thy poor slave
Prayeth thee, spare him ; for man’s toil is vain,
When the dread sea-gods, jealous, guard the prize.”

But Lygrul, for he scorned to have a slave
Oppose his will, spake, answering again
With a disdainful snort, “ Have I not said ?
Bedak do thou my bidding, or else die.
Know that my glaive is drawn. Plunge thou amain,
Or thou shalt surely learn that Lygrul’s wrath
Is deadlier than the rage of ocean gods.”

He spake, drawing the great glaive from the
sheath,

And stept toward the slave ; but Bedak heard
The movement, and, avoiding him, he plunged,
Fearing the sea-god less than Lygrul’s sword.

Now Bedak in the river of the south
Had fought the scaly-hided reptile fish,
The beast that moveth in the wave, or walks,
Even at his will, along the river marge ;
And often had he dashed his hide-fenced arm
In through the angered reptile’s yawning jaws,
With keen edged knife, smiting it even to death.
But more he feared the ocean monarch’s ire
Than the brute rage of the great river beast,
And the dread clashing of its ghastly jaws.
Therefore he, swimming ’neath the glistening wave,
Saw with affright each rock of doubtful form,
Or wavy sea-wrack, fearing there the god.
Unnerved with fear, his ill-informèd eyes
Showed truthless tales to his affrighted soul ;
Till at the last, o’ermastered by his dread,

Sudden he left the ocean's weed-heaped floor
And rose above the surface of the main.

Then Lygrul said, " Bedak, thou comest back
After slight search, fearing the ocean god ;
Ill hast thou done thus doing, for thy soul,
Be the sword found or not, will suffer loss,
Orphaned of the delicious light of day.

Oh diver-men ! be valiant in your hearts,
Else shall ye die as Bedak. Search ye well.
What ! are your lives not set upon the chance ?
Or is the god more terrible than death ? "

Swift, at his signal given, again a man
Left the boat's marge, and plunged into the main.
Again the toil was fruitless, for the sword
Evaded search—its shining hilt half hid
'Neath the brown, glistening cloak of ocean weed.

Then Lygrul, when he found his searching foiled,
Spake to a slave who crouched before his feet,
" They fear the spirit ; therefore seek they not,
So will our toil be fruitless to the end.
Thou fearest not, men say, the spirit race.
Confront the danger, winning the great prize."

Achah it was whom Lygrul's mandate now
Sent forth to dare the perils of the deep.
This did he, deeming that soul-conquering fear
Had overcome the divers' anxious hearts,
Who feared not peril from material things,
But shrank from unknown spiritual powers,
Whose might man may not measure nor resist.
Therefore he sent forth Achah ; for his fame
Was in the mouths of men, who spake strange things
Of his adventure in the shoreless sea,

Wherein he toiled away his years of youth.
For there were who affirmed that in his toil,
He, driven in his boat before the storm,
Had come into a spirit-peopled land,
Such as the eyes of men never before
Had looked upon, nor shall again behold,
Haply, so long as earth is overwatched
By the great sun and the unchanging stars.

Thus Achah, fearing not the spirit-race,
Plunged 'neath the wave and searchèd narrowly,
Yet vainly searched, for the great sword lay hid,
Wrapt round with close impenetrable gloom,
Therefore he back returned, with empty hands,
Baffled, despairful, to his angered lord.
And after him others, unknown to fame,
Sought with vain toil the falchion, and returned,
Mourning at heart, cursing their fruitless search,
For that their hopes of life ebbed slow away.
Rhad also sought, and Avrok sought again,
Much toiling, yet returned baffled at heart.

So all night long the agile divers sought
To win the falchion from the greedy deep,
Whose billows blue and avaricious caves
Still thwarted their intent. Man after man,
They plunged from the large skiff into the sea,
And minutes past; again above the wave
Rose the strong toilers vanquished. At the last,
Just when the ebon-wheeled car of night
Touched with its sombre tires the azure wave,
And the grey steeds of twilight from the East
Rose silent fast, and from her full filled urn
The clear dawn poured her still refreshing dews

Over the long-expectant flowers of earth,
One of the rowers, who had silent sat
Through the black night, rose from his place and spake,
"Oh! chief, I too, in mine own native land,
Have known the under-world beneath the wave.
Haply, I, searching, yet may find the blade,
Where these have failed. Only this thing I pray :
If that I win it not, spare thou my life,
Since of my own free will I face the deep."

And Lygrul spake, "Address thee to thy task.
Thy boon is granted. Howsoe'er it chance,
Whether thou find the sword or find it not,
Thy life is hedged with my inviolate word."

Then bared he his gaunt frame to face the deep.
Strong-limbed, not lightly baffled, he had been
Hunter of pearls in the far Eastern main.
On the boat's rim he stood, with hands close joined.
The first faint pearly glimmer of the morn
Fell glistening on his black strong-muscled frame.
A moment o'er the flood uncertain poised
He stood, then in the sullen wave down sank.
And minutes past, and the conspirators
Felt haunting fears that the last die was cast—
The last hope gone, that the attempt was vain.
At last, with straining eyes, and nose and mouth
Pouring forth crimson tides, he reappeared,
High in his hand bearing the charmed sword.
Then Lygrul with a sudden cry of joy
Stept forward, clutching at the diamond hilt,
Claiming the falchion from the swimmer's grasp ;
But by mischance the diver's hands close clasped
Around the scabbard, cramped by great fatigue,

Loosed not their hold, so the dread sword was drawn:
Then as the bright blade flashed into the air,
The diver, slain by the sword's fatal power,
That slew a man whene'er it left the sheath ;
Or else o'ermastered with exceeding toil,
Sank dying back beneath the hoary main ;
Nor rose again. But even as he sank
The sword's light smote upon his glazing eyes
Sunlike, portentous. O'er the unquiet deep
It shed a baleful light, kindling the tops
Of the green waves, with flakes of golden fire.
The fisher, dwelling by the lone sea-shore,
Saw the bright radiance o'er the sea-world glance,
And thought the sun new-risen. The herald of morn
Looked up and 'gan to tune his harsh shrill throat
To signal forth the sunrise. Little birds
Moved in their nests uneasy, and anon
Sent forth into the air a faint low note.
The beasts on the far mountains, stag and wolf,
Marked the bright gleam strike on the summit rocks,
And roused them from their lair, and shook aside
The dewdrops that the morn had sprinkled o'er
Their furry coats, and all live things on earth
Looked for the glad returning of the day.
But Lygrul, dreading much discovery
Plunged the bright sword beneath his cloak of hide,
And bade the rowing-men exert their strength ;
Then turned the vessel's brass beak to the sea,
Cleaving the bitter brine. They to their oars
Bent with a great endeavour ; even as men,
War-mariners, when the black battle joins,
Urge their long ships against the hostile line.

Swift flew the vessel through the salt, fresh waves,
The chill wind whistled through the seamen's hair,
And the strong brazen prow flung up amain,
As sharp it ploughed through each on-rolling wave,
The briny drops in swift-recurring showers,
Beating upon the slaves' sundarkened cheeks,
Drenching with bitter spray their swart-crisp hair.
Thus a space over the unquiet deep,
Blue-heaving, the long galley crunched its way.
But when the city from all gazing eyes
Had well-nigh faded, seeming but a cloud ;
Then Lygrul spake unto the rowing-men,
Bidding them hold their course to a far shore,
Whereon a castle stood, which owned him lord.
Thither they came ; then pass'd the archway dark
Into the court. But when the iron gate,
Resounding, fell, cutting off all escape,
Quick at a signal given by Lygrul's hand,
The chieftains drew with speed their massive swords,
And smote the diver-men, sparing not one.
Yea ! and though one man, shunning the sharp blow,
Close clung round Lygrul's knees, praying the prayer
Reverenced of gods and men, crying for grace,
Yet was it vain ; for Lygrul hewed him down ;
Since Chavah said, " Dead lips speak not at all ;
But living lips uncover secret things."
Therefore he slew them, being filled with fear,
Lest Arvan's ears should learn his treachery.
Next summoned he his warriors—men, whose hair
Was grizzled with long following of their lord
Through many a summer-parchèd battle plain
And winter-icèd march. To them he spake

A prudent lie, showing to them his deed,
Also the hidden cause, saying, "The slaves
Are dead ; for they were traitors to their lord,
Plotting to slay him in his holy sleep.
Ye, therefore, hide them from the face of heaven.
Hercar and Zular, ye who saved my life,
Watch that my will be done. Lo ! I depart,
For the king's service claims my utmost speed."

Then did he bid his slaves, that they should bring
A fleet steed to their lord. So swift away
O'er the wide plains unpausingly he rode,
Seeking his palace in the royal town.
Thither arrived, to Chavah straight he passed,
And communed with her, showing her his toil.
"Gained is the prize," he said, "long sought, desired.
King Arvan's falchion, that devoured men,
Is in my hand. Now therefore, Chavah, rise,
And triumph greatly." Then Queen Chavah rose,
While a great light of triumph flushed her face
And fired her eye. And for an instant speech
Failed her, for mighty was her joy's excess.
Nor could the feelings thronging in her breast
Find utterance to paint her ecstasy ;
For the word-messengers, that to the world
Go forth as heralds, speaking joy or woe,
Uncertain how to frame tidings so high
Of joyfulness, issued not from the lips.
And twice her words failed in a broken cry
Of exultation. Then her own strong heart
Triumphed o'er woman's weakness, and she spoke :
"At last hath Fortune smiled, and the day dawns
Of Arvan's desolation. Lygrul, give

The sword into my hands. Quick! let me feel
My heart's hope stablished." There stretched she out
Her hand, and laid hold on the diamond hilt.
Then first her eyes fell on the changed sheath;
For Lygrul had the sword new scabbarded
In his own sheath, hiding its light from men.
"What then is this?" she cried, greatly oppressed;
"This is not as the sheath of Arvan's sword."
And Lygrul's tongue unfolded all the tale,
And showed to her how the change was wrought.
"'Tis well," she said; "the scabbard hath small worth:
It is the blade, and not the sheath that slays.
But thou, O Lygrul! hast thou made right sure
That babbling tongues bring not betraying words
Unto King Arvan's ears? Where are the men
Who from the deep rescued the magic glaive?"
Lygrul replied, "Queen, I have worked thy will;
They sleep in bloody graves. Chavah, I fear
We spill blood overmuch. 'Tis time to pause."
But Chavah answered him with scornful lips:
"What matters blood? Kings in one battle shed
More than the murderers of a thousand years.
Yet who doth blame them if their soul loves blood?
Who shrink from shedding it are ne'er renowned;
But they who dye their garments deep in gore,
Fashion at length Empire's red robe of sway,
That doth distinguish them from the vile herd
Of the peace lovers through all after days.
Say they were slaughtered! They were but as flies,
That buzz about on a hot Summer noon,
Made to be slain if wearisome." "Thou read'st
My words amiss," said Lygrul hastily.

“ Blood is but blood, and hath no special worth ;
As water is water : but if stintless shed
It leaves a stain, and may bear witness still.”

Then Chavah answered, “ Why, they were but slaves !
What preciousness hath such unvalued blood,
That we should reverence its ruddy glow,
As though it trickled in the veins of kings ?
Their corpses are the steps o’er which we climb
Toward the fair throne of all-deserved success.
Look on such deeds with an heroic mind :
Warriors should face the future, not the past.
Thou art no common man, that thou shouldst doubt
Concerning deaths of slaves : a leader, thou
Shalt win the crown whose glory dazzles men,
Making hearts all forget the devious path,
And accidents whereby the goal is won.
Come ; for we loiter. Let us plot anew,
Edging our councils with the magic sword.
So shall we stablish now no unsure plot,
But sap the rock-set base of Arvan’s power.”

And Lygrul, listening, obeyed her words,
Turned from the past ; and they two spake awhile,
Planning to overthrow King Arvan’s throne.

CANTO X.

GREAT are the deathless treaders of the sky,
Whose feet divine walk the blue fields of air,
And trample on the golden-tinted clouds.
Great also are the earth-powers, who hold sway,
Ruling with brazen sceptres over men,
Having fair homes on the adorned earth.
For these have also empire over lives.
Worthily are they worshipped with dread rites,
And snuff into their nostrils the sweet scent
Of fresh-shed blood, and odour of burnt flesh,
That smokes upon their altars ; for they are
All gods of mighty power, much to be sought,
Adored with frequent offerings of death,
And made propitious with the silvery cloud,
Greatly perfumed, of eastern frankincense.

Ambition builds his shrine on battlefields
Stained with black blood ; and, in his honour slain,
Fall bodies of earth's children, torn, rent, gashed,
By all the ready instruments of death,
Which his high-priests,—sworded, world-wasting men,—
Wield, fitly honouring him, who is their lord.
To him the peasant's burning home sends up
A pleasant scent. On white man-feeding wheat,
By armed feet trodden to poached filth,

He looks stern-smiling. Unto him men give,
Knowing such offering due, the agonies
Of helpless women, and weak children's cries ;
So, his dread hunger sated, he is still.

Lean-visaged, greedy-eyed, with haggard brow,
With thin blue lips, and meagre, bloodless cheeks,
Great Avarice sits. Empire he too on earth
Hath, and right willing subjects. His high throne
Is set in life's far west, where the sun dips,
And the shades deepen. Though day's orient orb
Sees Avarice worshipped, yet Age serves him most,
And his vast empire stretches to the grave.
His might is chiefly shown when silver-haired,
Weak-limbed old men, spent with the march of life,
Obeying him, with palsy-stricken hands
Toil, till the night of death is on their souls,
Harder than scourged slaves in a metal mine,
Gathering for him bright flakes of yellow ore,
So they may satisfy his lust for gold.
Surely he too is not a realmless god,
Being much honoured of the sons of men.

Unlike to him, having no fixed abode,
Wandering with linkèd hands about the world,
Walk Envy and lean Want. Want, pale as death,
With ghastly face, whose every bone shows through ;
With hunger-sunken cheeks, and faded eyes,
And carcase all defrauded of its flesh ;
Even death's disrobing hands scarce strip men more.
Before his wasting feet the fairest land
Turns to a desert ; all wealth disappears ;
His touch turns ore to earth. So, compassed round
With poverty, he journeyeth evermore.

Him follows Envy, scarce a step behind,
Lank-haired, with evil smile of discontent,
And sad repining eyes. Nought counteth she
Of her soft robes, and purse of stored gold ;
For she, girt round with Want's drear, arid world,
Looks ever onward with desiring eyes,
O'er-brimmed with greed, to the untrodden fields,
By Want's destroying feet unwasted yet.
Ne'er will the hunger of her soul be quenched,
She being greedier than fire or death,
Having immortal famine in her heart.

Alone, fierce-eyed, towers the gaunt form of Hate ;
Full-fed, yet lean as any eastern wolf,
In that his meat doth only 'gender gall.
For as all fuel only feeds a flame,
And even rich robes, or carven work, or heaps
Of stored grain, do but augment the rage,
So all the gifts showered by the Hours on Hate
Increase his inward fury. On his brow
Dwells an eternal frown ; and on his lips,
That hide pale teeth, clenched in unpitying mood,
Light laughter, grateful to the souls of men,
Findeth no home. High in his bony hand
He wields a cruel scourge, whose every lash
Is armed with hooks, and knots with iron charged,
Wherewith right savagely he smites his foes,
But wounds himself with each recoiling blow ;
Ploughing his own bared back with bloody wheals ;
Wherefrom arises in his vexèd heart
Fresh fury, urging him to strife renewed.
Unloved of all the gods he roams the earth,
Lone as a hurricane, maker of wrecks.

Yet hath he many human worshippers,
For that the sons of men are prone to wrath ;
And hard the task to reach his awful shrine,
So thronged are all the gates with praying bands.

Hard by his temple towers another dome ;
Ill-favoured, circled round with mounded filth,
And obscene garbage brought by willing hands.
Such gifts loveth the god that therein dwells.
Temple it is of Hate's twin brother Lust,
Night roamer is he on the dusky earth,
But shuns the cheerful courts of sunlit day.
Loathly his face, o'erblotched with hideous scabs,
More spotted than the skin of desert pard ;
For all the blood within him is corrupt.
Therefore he hides his visage from the sun ;
Knowing himself most foul, he haunts the gloom.
He is a dainty feeder on fair flesh,
And is well nourished by the sons of men,
Yet is his hunger ceaseless in its rage.
More frequent gifts claimeth he of mankind
Than Want, Ambition, Avarice, or Hate ;
But they are granted freely, for that he
Is greatly sought after and loved much.
And this the source of his eternal rage.
All the fair prey he taketh for his food
Turns to corruption even in his hands.
Then doth he loathe it, loving it before,
And flingeth it to earth, seeking new meat.
Such is the nature of the great god Lust.

Other immortals are there yet on earth.
Ruin, wide waster ! Like a ravenous beast
He prowleth through the lands, seeking a prey.

Yet trusteth some day, having gorged his fill,
That he shall rest awhile his restless feet.
His are great iron teeth that grind to dust
The stately towers ; and with his forceful hands,
Brazen-clawed, he doth rend the marble halls
Of kingly homes. On the strong walls he preys ;
Through the untended wastes of desolate towns,
Deserted of their children, Ruin stalks,
Or haunts fallen temples of forsaken gods ;
For on these things he pastures. Yet is he
Unsated still by all he doth devour.
So when he hath destroyed man and his works,
Some day upon his own flesh shall he feed,
Then pass away slain by his deadly feast.

Now all these Powers are dwellers on the plains ;
But there is one dread fane exalted high,
That in mid-heaven shines. Built on the top
Of a precipitous mountain, fenced with rocks,
Jagged, unclothed with verdure ; girt with ice,
Higher than eagle builds its airy nest,
On the cragged mountains, looking o'er the lands,
It standeth lone, and scorneth all beneath.
This is the shrine of Pride ; eldest of gods
Who upon earth have dwelling-place : of old
Called into being, when the unstained Light
With eyes clear-shining upon Darkness gazed :
For they twain met where the descending sky
Touches the underworld. But Darkness shrank
From the bright presence, pierced with inward grief,
Since, fearing long unsafe his ancient reign,
He, pondering in his heart, had waked to life
The embryo essence, and his hollow breast

Swelled with the presence of the unborn god.
But when sweet Light with all-revealing eyes
Gazed on the ebon shape, it not endured
Longer to hide its tenant. Then Pride sprang,
Like a black cub from a black panther's womb,
Standing even in the presence hall of Light.
Hence is it that he had a three-fold realm,
Roaming the heaven, the earth, and undergloom
In ancient days, a grief to gods and men.
But forasmuch as the sky-gods were grieved,
And all their sweet feasts by his presence marred,
They banished him from heaven. And now he builds
Deep on the furthest confines of the night
His uttermost altar, and on earth doth raise
His temple on the lofty mountain crest
Steep in the air of heaven. Thus for his own
Claims he all realms between. To him ascend
His earthly worshippers, crowds following crowds.
Though great the toil, and frequent are the falls
That do afflict men on that pilgrimage.
These over jagged rocks are dashed to earth,
Those starve among the ghastly fields of ice,
Others, the savage prowlers of the wilds
Slay, cracking with white teeth their broken bones,
Thus they, who climb with bleeding feet the height,
Are slain by various shapes of ghastly death.
Yet many pilgrim feet attempt the shrine,
For that his countenance of goodly gloom,
Seen from afar, lures the faint eyes of men,
That, being weak, turn wounded from the light,
And gladly seek to his propitious aid.
Thus do men seek to many earthly Powers,

Erring exceedingly ; for these mighty ones,
Ungrateful even to their worshippers,
Being evil-natured, scourge who worship them.

Now all these Powers and others like to them,
But of scant fame and less extended sway,
Dwell on the green earth, being sought of men.
But ~~after~~ these there are yet other lords,
All of unearthly birth, dwellers on high :
The clear-faced, shining Sun, great king of heaven,
Who through the day delights the souls of men
By the much shedding forth of light and warmth,
Since in his pleasant smile earth's children live.
Also the Moon-god, giver of swift deaths,
Of sleep, and rest, ruling the silent hours,
Hath in the skies his home. With him the stars,
As evening deepens o'er the outwearied earth,
Come from the unseen world; and with bright feet
Solemnly walk over the arch of blue,
Built up of sapphire stone : their god-like robes,
More lustrous than white silver from the mine,
When purged in fire it hath lost all its dross,
Trail silently over the purple floor.
Such are the sky-gods, having homes on high ;
But little can the sons of men declare
Of their bright nature, and unsurely paint,
Even willing hands, each pleasant countenance.
For they are dwellers in the heaven of heavens,
And their pure feet unseldom visit earth,
Seeing it is so stained with human crime,
That—for they will not tread defiled soil—
On it their feet scarce find a resting-place.

Such are the gods, rulers of earth and sky ;

Also the earth-powers, honoured much of men,
And of them some are evil, and some good,
And all men serve the evil or the good,
Since of the sons of men who walk the earth
None are there found who reverence not a god.

Now of the earth-powers, Arvan, the great king,
Had worshipped many with a willing mind ;
Yet Avarice served not, being free of heart,
And showering gold on men as sowers fling
The yellow grain upon the furrowed fields.
Therefore the evil powers gave him reward,
But not as do the sky-gods ; for these give
Gladness of heart, and ease for service done.
So that a man, although undowered with wealth,
Low in estate, and to renown unknown,
Smiled on by them, is rich, nor lacketh ought.
Far other gifts bestow the evil Ones,
Who, sceptred, rule over the hearts of men.
Anguish and pain, and pining discontent,
These are their gifts wherewith they honour toil,
They being foes to man, hating him much.
Therefore the very crown of the wide earth,
Golden, and jewelled with all sway, is yet
To guilty brows a diadem of fire.
Such was it now to Arvan. He had lost
All hope, all pleasure, all delight in life,
Because the evil gods repaid him well.
Nor could the sky-gods shield him from his doom ;
For of the sky-gods he had served but one,
The bright-haired, ancient, venerable Sun,
Who loved him greatly for his service wrought,
Yet might not wholly change his earthly fate,

Seeing not even the Sun, ruling supreme,
May change the tissue of self-woven fate,
Making it other than in truth it is.
Yet, for he loved him, in the homes above
He made him ready a fair place of rest ;
And upon earth he filled his warrior heart
With strength and courage, that he might be fit
To sit hereafter at the feasts of heaven.
Thus though alone, gnawed by great pain of heart,
With undismayed soul within his hall
King Arvan sat, and planned his future reign,
Watching the battle-moment draw more nigh,
When he would shake, though for brief space, aside
The weight of care that was upon his heart.

Then to him pondering, Lygrul entered in,
Saying, " My Lord, oh ! king, the chieftains wait
In the great council-hall. The herald's feet
Are on the threshold ; and thy servants pray,
' Let thy dread presence shine upon our eyes.' "
And Arvan said, " Go forth unto the men,
The chieftains ; say, ' Thus Arvan saith, the king,
The praying words have come into my ears :
Behold, my feet tread toward the council-stone.' "

So Lygrul took the message ; but the king
Went forth unto the council-hall in state,
Waited upon by all his armed guard,
And all who ate bread in the royal house—
A numberless array of goodly men,
And silk-robed, golden-crowned councillors.
Thus came he in great pomp unto the hall,
Where stood the chief lords of the northern realm.
Then Arvan sat him down, solemn and slow,

As doth beseem a king, upon his throne,
While all the chieftains raised their strong right hands,
Shouting with clamorous voices, "Live, O king."

The great shout died away. Then Arvan said,
"Where is the herald-man who seeks our face?
Bid him come forth with speed and show his word."

So, through the door opposed, entered alone
The herald-man, beloved of the gods.
Grave was his look, as fitteth whoso bears
The words of kings. Over his shoulders flowed
His long grey hair, far o'er his golden cloak;
And his white glistening beard hung awful down,
Hiding the jewelled claspings on his breast.
In his right hand he bore a willow wand
Glistening as ivory. Silent he stood,
Waiting the pleasure of the mighty king.

Then Arvan said: "Thou comest from afar;
Sent by the mighty king that rules the West,
With message-words meet for a monarch's ear.
Speak thou them undelaying, hiding nought."

So the grave herald, stretching forth his staff,
Cried with a loud voice, speaking prudent words:
"Arvan, King of the Northmen, apt in arms!
Hearken unto my speech. The West King saith:
'My brother, I have heard the din of war,
The rattle of the spear upon the shield,
The neighing of the war-steed for the strife,
The thundering of the scythèd chariot-wheels;
And lo! a great voice, travelling o'er the earth,
Hath come unto me, piercing to my ears,
Saying, 'Against thee Arvan levies war!'
Now, therefore, spake the voice false words or true?'"

And Arvan answered : " True words spake the voice.
Oh, herald ! much beloved of the gods,
Unto the lord thy king return and say,
' Arvan hath spoken, saying a sure word :
See that thine armed men keep watch and ward ;
Ere that the crescent moon thrice fills her horns,
Arvan with all his hosts is at thy gates.' "
But when he heard the answer of the king,
The reverend herald brake his glistening staff
Of peeled willow with his sinewy hands,
Saying, " Oh king ! my lord the West King saith :
' King Arvan, if thy heart is set on war,
Be this white broken staff a witness sure,
Before the face of men and of the gods,
That unstained peace is broken by thy will :
Now will I grind the sword, making it sharp.' "

Then turned the herald and he went his way,
No man forbidding him. For in those days
Men revered the herald of the king,
Knowing him loved of the all-judging gods.

Slowly the loud resounding footstep-clank,
Made by the silver sandals, which of old
On ambassage were by grave heralds worn,
Died from the marble-paved corridor ;
The while the chieftains round King Arvan sat,
Waiting with eager hearts words from his mouth.
Calmly, majestic, from his basalt throne
He rose, and stretched his hand aloft in air ;
As a great tawny lion, from his couch
On a bare rock arising, in his heart
Meaning to rend a prey, lifteth on high
His vast death-dealing paw, shedder of blood.

“Chieftains!” he said, “ye heard King Arvan’s word,
Also the answer of the herald-man.

Now are war’s iron gates expanded wide,
And we must take sharp swords into our hands,
Buckler our breasts anew with well-proved steel,
And arm us for the approaching battle-hour.
Know well the West King is a mighty lord ;
He and his servants will not tamely fall.
They are not sheep who yield up easy lives
Unto the leagued assaults of banded wolves ;
They are a gathered herd of hornèd beasts,
Weaponed and fierce. Yet may they fall a prey
Unto the stronger prowlers of the wild.
Let us arise and tame them. Have we not,
In many a deathful fight o’erthrown earth’s kings,
And trampled on the jewels of their crown ?
Shall these not be as they ? Oh ! men of war,
Go ye your ways. Gather our armèd powers ;
Erelong we march to quell the vaunting foe.
We will smite down their pride with well-edged steel,
And plant our feet upon their subject-necks.
These shall be even as they ; they too shall fall.”

Then with a great shout rose the warrior chiefs,
Assenting to the summons of the king ;
For in their hairy breasts his words of flame
Had raised fierce answering fire. High rang the cry,
“Lead on thy servants, Lord ! Their swords are sharp.”

But, when he heard that eager, heart-filled cry,
King Arvan looked upon them with the smile
That leaders only wear, who see the men,
Death-proved in many a battle at their side,
Eager once more to grapple with the foe.

“ When thrice the moon hath sphered his silver orb,
And waned away, leaving the heavens dark,
We will go hence,” he said, “ and smite the foe.”
He ceased, and there was silence in the hall;

Then as he came, he went, slowly, in state,
His guards surrounding him ; the silken train
Of princes and of courtiers following,
Whilst the land’s council, when the crowd had past,
Went also forth through the opposing doors
With earnest haste, honouring King Arvan’s word.

But ’midst those hastening greatly, not a foot
Was fleet as Lygrul’s ; for his hope of heart
Urged him, more keenly than awakened fear
Drives the fleet hind from the pursuing pard.
So swiftly sped he through the throngèd streets
Unto his palace ; there sought Chavah’s call,
Where she sat lonely, thinking weary thoughts.
“ Chavah,” he said, “ we seek the battlefield
When thrice the moon hath waned away in gloom,
Leaving the heavens orphaned of his light.
What is thy thought ? Short space for plotting now.”
“ Yea, it is short,” she said, “ yet long enough
To wreck King Arvan’s power if fitly used.
Call thou to me Zular and Hercar straight ;
Let them come hither with disguised face,
Lest men—for they are prompt to see a wrong—
Explore our treachery. Bring thou them at eve,
When the thick gloom conceals all evil things,
So shall they shun more easily men’s eyes.
I, sitting here the while, will weave my thoughts
Into a cord stronger than iron chain,
That shall avail to strangle Arvan’s might.”

She spake ; then Lygrul went upon his way,
Obeying her commands ; for that his soul
Looked up to her with reverencing eyes,
She being wiser in the ways of crime
Than he, although his heart was prone to wrong,
His mind not void of cunning thoughts of guilt.
He sought him out the chieftains where they sat
Each one alone, revolving in their minds
Grave questions of the future. Hoping much
That the won sword would free their limbs from chains,
These brought he to the palace in the gloom,
When the black night hid with her dusky wing
All shapes of guilt that wander upon earth.

Then in Queen Chavah's cell silent they sat,
While Lygrul's lips unveiled the secret plan.
"Hearken," he said, "O chieftains ! The day dawns,
Much longed for of your souls, when Arvan's fall
Shall from your limbs strike off the galling chain.
The sword is in our hands, whereby his life
Heretofore hath been guarded. He is now
A man, whose power may be o'erthrown of men.
Therefore, great princes, men renowned in war,
Kings in old days ere Arvan spoiled your realms,
Let us take thought and compass the king's doom.
First, know ye surely that the time is short :
We must strike hard and swiftly, or we fail.
Come, therefore ; let us take wise counsel straight,
Showing our souls, saying no idle word.
Arvan doth march hence after the third moon ;
He goeth forth to face a mighty foe—
Not as in old days, for the sword is lost.
Few will be left of all the armed men

Within the royal city of the Rha,
When Arvan hath gone forth leading his hosts ;
For Arvan's heart is wise : he knoweth well
That each bright blade is needed in the ranks ;
And he will trust to his much-dreaded name
To scare, he absent, evil-thoughted foes
From all assaults on this his royal home.
Perchance a weak guard tarries yet behind ;
These will I choose from the false-hearted ones,
Who, though they serve, yet loathe King Arvan's sway.
Revolt arising, they will turn aside,
Joining ill-doers. In the city dwell
Many whose souls even now do call you kings,
Subjects who now are slaves. Awake their hopes
With prophecy of the bright day at hand.
So, when six moons have fled, while Arvan's hands
Are grappling with the foe, ye shall awake
In his own halls the red destroying flame,
And topple all his glory to the dust."

Zular replied, "I deem the plan might hold.
Full many slaves there are who loathe the king ;
Though various in their races, one in hate.
'Twere no hard task to rouse the sleeping flame."
"Nay ; hopeful art thou, Zular, overmuch,"
Said Hercar ; "strongly based is Arvan's throne,
Earthquake alone would level it with earth.
Greatly I fear no strength of ours avails
Against his mountainous massiveness of strength.
Better to wait until his force decays,
Lest, grasping overmuch, we wholly fail."

Then, as a hot fount in a frozen land
Wakes sudden from its silent rest, and hurls,

Moved by its inward rage, the torrent forth
Boiling, impetuous, into the clear air
So Chavah's mouth poured forth indignant words,
For cowardice was hated of her soul.
"What hast thou then to lose save a slave's life?
Hath such life worth, that thou should'st cherish it,
As though 'twere precious as an orb of sight?
Be brave, oh, Hercar! Strike and tremble not.
Safety doth lie in action, not in rest.
Oh! thou, who hesitatest yet to strike;
Hast thou no bitter wrongs to whet thy steel,
No insults deep that clamour for revenge?
Remember Arvan's scornings, how thou wast
As mire beneath his feet. Think on the men,
Thy faithful subjects, slaughtered with the sword.
What! art thou not ashamed to shun a death,
Which even thy maidens fronted for thy sake?
Know, I, a woman, having lesser wrongs,
Would face a peril, whose gigantic shape
Dwarfs these slight dangers, to secure revenge."
"Chavah! thy words are brave; but thou thyself,
Even as a coney, frightened by a noise,
Shelterest within when danger fills the air.
Ill it beseems thee then to hurl hard words
At those who face the fray." There Chavah brake
Hastily in upon Prince Hercar's speech:
"Say'st thou I dare not risk my life with men?
I dared more, Hercar, stealing Arvan's sword,
Than warrior men do on a battle day.
Nor think thou that I shrink from extreme pain.
See, how the tyrant's hand hath crushed my flesh,
For it is tender though my heart is hard,

Yet did he wring no accent from my lips.
Not mine the thought ye should front death alone ;
Danger, apart from me, ye shall not know.
Ill dost thou judge me, Hercar, feeling not
That I would dash my breast on well-ground steel ;
Or hurl my flesh into red gnawing flames ;
Or give it to the wild beasts to be torn
Piecemeal asunder, could I win my end.
Such sorrows would I face, and think the while,
Filled with the joyfulness of sweet revenge,
I did no more, than if I sat me down
On a flower-broidered bank on summer day
To watch the pleasant setting of the sun.
Thou, wilt thou lie down like a beaten hound,
That whines, but dares not bite." "Peace, mighty
Queen,"

Said Lygrul, "Hercar is a noble prince.
He will do all that a brave man may dare.
For thee, well know we thy strong resolute heart,
Waste we not therefore costly time in speech
That leads no-whither. Doth not Arvan live ?
And he must die. Hercar and Zular, chiefs
Mighty of race, ye must raise swift revolt
While Arvan's powers are absent from the land.
For all must toil else will he hold his own.
For that his clasp around the subject lands
Is tighter than a wild snake's fatal coil
Around the victim whom he hugs to death.
Yet are there thousands in King Arvan's realm,
Who would arise, if summoned by their lords,
And smite his power till it lay prone in dust,
These must ye gather first. Once raised the flag

Of red rebellion, they who feel a wrong
Will gather to your banners. All unite
Gladly against oppressors. For men wreak
Vengeance with well-pleased hearts. Kindle the flame
However small, with wise persistent care :
Wakened, each breath will but increase the rage,
Till Arvan's realm is wholly overspread
With general conflagration, which shall mock
All human effort to allay the fire.
The troops that garrison the royal town
Will fall from their allegiance. Be it mine
To fill their ranks with traitors, who but need
Fair prospect of success to turn aside,
Joining the mutineers. A mightier foe
Waits Arvan on the confines of his realm
Than he hath known before. The sword is lost.
Armed rebellion will assail the rear.
What then shall save him ? Chiefs ! we shall prevail.
King Arvan's days are numbered, and his power
Is like a wave, swallower of many ships,
That even now curleth about to rise,
Break on the shore, and pass in foam away.
Lose ye no hour, but spread abroad revolt ;
For it must break forth in the second moon
After our marching forth. Then Chavah said,
" Tell ye my people I shall rise again
Resuming once more life's fair robe of flesh
When the hour dawns to lead them to the foe ;
They shall not strike for life, I being far."

Then Lygrul said, " I will seek out a man,
Now a chained slave, but once a chosen chief
Among the people. Unto him, great queen,

Shalt thou unfold thy counsel. He will aid
Thy fervent heart, doing thy bidding well,
For his soul hateth Arvan even as thine.
Hercar and Zular, toil ye zealously ;
So shall ye wear, as well beseemeth kings,
Gold bracelets once again instead of gyves."

CANTO XI.

THUS Arvan girded up his loins for war,
He and his people ; gathering multitudes,
Shield-lifters all, myriads of stalwart men,
Ordering them by their nations. Through all lands,
Even from the ice-cliffs of the Northern sea,
From the ancient hills of the broad wave-beat isle,
Cradle of Northern men, to where the South
Gasps 'neath the torrid sun, he summoned tribes,
Sending swift messengers on wind-fleet steeds,
Saying, " King Arvan armeth him for war ;
Now therefore sharpen every man his sword,
And nail fresh hides upon the battle shields,
Coming with speed, for that the strife is great."
This word obeyed all men. Arvan's fear
Was upon every heart, nor did men dare
To strive with him, despising his commands—
Seeing his might was as the might of gods.
Thus then the Northmen gathered up their power ;
Even as a thunderstorm, from every side
Of the blue fields of heaven upgathers strength,
Stores of black rain and tower-destroying flame,
Assembling all its forces of grey cloud,
Till terrible it lowers o'er the earth,
Appalling men, dark as the frown of gods.

Meanwhile unto King Emeth, on his way
Returning, came the herald who had sought
King Arvan's face, journeying to Rhaon's walls
With message-words concerning war or peace.

When therefore Emeth knew the herald's feet,
Travelling o'er dusty breadths of desert plains,
And through green-leafèd wilderness of woods,
Stood once more on the soil of his own land,
He summoned round him all his valiant chiefs,
Who, callèd, mindful of the gathering word,
Assembled ere the rising of the sun,
As was their wont, upon the council plain,
Without the city walls. For in the West,
Men met not for war-council in closed halls
In the far elder days, as through the North
The chiefs have usèd from the ancient years ;
But, being many, on the grass-clad plain,
Guarded from spying eyes by sworded men.
They spake of war, sitting on seats of stone.
This did they, for the Western men of old
Worshipped the sky, owning it god supreme ;
Being thought-darkened, knowing not that heaven,
Fair-purpled, glorious in its majesty,
Is but one clear arch built of sapphire stone,
Fashioned by the wise fingers of the stars,
A worthy pavement for their feet divine.

Broad was the plain whereon the Western chiefs
Gathered by tens and hundreds, broad and fair,
Grass-clad even to its margin, where the thrones,
Rock built, o'er-canopied with granite slabs,
Stood, girdling it with one gigantic ring.

Still, here and there, upon that Western mead,

Men's eyes discern the fragments of those seats
Whereon, in times gone by, those counsel men
Sat like to demi-gods, decreeing war.
But broken now their thrones. The years divine,
Strong offspring of the sun, have with large hands
O'erthrown them, leaving but the lichened stones
In mounded heaps, witnessing of the past.
For all have fallen, strewing the green earth
With shattered fragments and great mounds of rock,
Save one grey throne of state, o'er-canopied
With a huge slab of granite, weather-soiled,
Propt on three rugged shafts of unhewn stone,
Beneath whose shade the Monarch of the West
Sat when his warriors gathered for debate.

Thus then the chiefs assembled with due speed,
Obeying Emeth's words. Upon the thrones
The elders sat around, greybearded men,
All venerable, fitted to command,
Able to weigh words, judging what is best.
Beside them sat the chieftains young in years,
Strong wielders of the sword, valiant in strife,
These of the state the hands, and those the head.
Silent they waited, sitting on their thrones,
Willing to hearken to King Emeth's word.
Then stretching forth his hand, King Emeth spoke,
"Elders and wise men, able to discern
Truth, winnowing from the grain the light-winged chaff;
Brave warriors also, of our father's land
Shelter and honour, proved much in strife,
Hearken. We sent to Arvan, the great king,
The herald, bearer of the willow wand,
Pealed, unbroken, save with war declared.

Also we placed wise words within his lips
That he should speak them in King Arvan's ear,
Saying, 'King Arvan, is it peace or war?'
Know now that he hath seen the northern king,
Monarch of many nations, lord of lands.
Now hath our herald home returned from far,
Bearing the answer in his prudent heart,
His feet are standing by the plain of thrones,
They touch its grassy edge, waiting our will;
Say then, shall we receive King Arvan's word?"

Him answered straight the warriors and wise men,
"Let him come forth King Emeth, tarrying not.
We wait his message; opening our ears."

Therefore spake Emeth; and sure men went forth,
Seeking the herald, where he stood anigh,
Waiting the summons to the plain of thrones.
To him straight came the messengers with speed;
Also they spake, "Emeth, king of the West,
Saith unto thee, Herald, beloved of men
Much honoured of the gods, come forth with speed;
The warriors and wise men await thy word."

Straightway the herald came before the king;
Whilst all the assembly on the counsel plain
Gathered in silence, listened for his tale.
No willow wand was in his reverend hand,
When he came in before the Western king,
Whence all the chiefs knew that he brought them war.
Thereon the West king spake, "Herald divine,
Loved both of gods and men, speak thou thy word,
Not hiding aught for fear or for regard.
What message sendeth us, Arvan the king?"

He said, and the grave herald, stretching forth

His staffless hand, made answer to the king.
“Hearken, oh, Emeth! lord of many lands;
Of nations, and of cities numberless;
Also wise councillors and chieftains, hear.
In state I came before the northern king,
Where seated on the basalt throne he sat,
In his high hall, girt round by mighty men.
Thereon I spake, doing mine embassy,
‘Arvan, King of the Northmen, great in arms,
Hearken unto my speech. The West king saith,
‘My brother I have heard the din of war,
The rattle of the spear upon the shield,
The neighing of the war-steed for the strife,
The thundering of the scythèd chariot wheels,
And lo! a great voice travelling o’er the earth,
Hath come unto me, piercing to my ears,
Saying, “against thee, Arvan levies war,”
Now therefore, spake the voice false words or true?’
And Arvan answered, ‘True words spake the voice,
Oh! herald, much belovèd of the gods,
Unto the lord thy king, return and say,
Arvan hath spoken, saying a sure word—
See that thine armed men keep watch and ward.
Ere that the moon thrice fills her crescent horns,
Arvan with all his host stands at thy gates.’
Then did I, hearing Arvan’s words of strife,
Break the white willow-wand with my two hands,
And flung the fragments on the palace floor,
Saying, ‘Oh! king, my lord, the West king saith,
King Arvan, if thy heart is set on war,
Be this white broken staff a witness sure,
Before the face of men and of the gods,

That unstained peace is broken by thy will.
Now will I grind the sword, making it sharp.'
Thou therefore, Emeth, monarch of the West,
Look for King's Arvan's war. Make fast the gates.
Surely he comes with speed, delaying not."

Great silence was, when the grave herald ceased ;
For each man, pondering the unwelcome word,
Thought doubtful of the strife ; since Arvan's fame
Stood high above all warrior-fame of earth.
Also men knew that the dread magic sword
Lent him strange powers of slaughtering, not his own.
Not long the stillness was, for Emeth spoke,
"The guilt," he cried, "be on King Arvan's head ;
Also the blood that shall be spilt in strife.
The gods are witnesses, we seek not war ;
Neither desire it in our inmost soul ;
Yet, forasmuch as he doth arm his host,
Remaineth now no choise ; but we must stand
Weaponed, to face assault. Oh ! herald-man,
Well hast thou done our bidding, speaking words
Prudent and full of truth. Loved of the gods,
Depart in peace, returning to thy home,
Having rich recompense, garments and gold.
All fitly hast thou done thine embassy ;
Neither do we require it at thy hands,
That thou hast brought us war, we craving peace ;
For Arvan, urged on by the evil gods,
Placed in thy hands, hater of men, his gift.
This hast thou guiltless brought, though bringing strife."

Then Emeth spake unto his treasure-men,
Who kept the treasure-houses of the king,
That they should give the herald precious gifts ;

A silken robe, broïdered with cunning art,
Wonderful with great wealth of golden leaves,
And flowers many-hued, exceeding thought ;
Also, five hundred squares of beaten gold.
But the grave herald, stretching out his hands,
Tokening his grateful thought, abased his head,
White with the snows of three-score years and seven,
Much honouring Emeth, king of Western men :
Afterwards past he mutely on his way.

Then did King Emeth, lord of Western men,
Rising, stretch out his golden sceptre-rod,
Fair, ruby-tipped, whereon he stayed his steps
When that he walkèd with his fellow-men,
And to the gathered chieftains spake he words—
“ Chiefs, prudent councillors, and white-haired men,
Ancient, whose is the wisdom of the years,
Arvan hath set his heart, purposing war.
Evil is Arvan's heart, he loveth blood.
Kingdoms are deserts where his feet have passed,
For that he warred on them, and they are not.
The fruit-trees, good for food, that clothed the lands
With robes of fertile beauty, making glad
The hearts of multitudes, have ceased from earth ;
His axemen, hewing with the broad, brown blades
Of iron axes, have destroyed their life.
Men, women, children, have his warriors' swords
Smitten, not sparing : for his heart is hard,
Knowing not mercy. Lo ! they lay in heaps
Where'er his armies past ; even as the grass,
Mingled with flowers fair-petalled, many-hued,
Lies mounded where the labouring scythemen toil.
The earth makes witness, showing of his deeds :

As a wild beast, passing along the sands,
Leaves in them the deep imprint of its claws,
So Arvan steps across the desolate lands,
Marking his path with dead. Their bleaching bones
Whiten a thousand hills, a thousand plains,
As the hail whitens them when storms have past.
Nor did men suffer only, dying deaths ;
More yet, with chained hands, herded like beasts,
His spearmen drove on their returning way
Northwards, slaves all unblest to Northern lords,
Slaking the arid dust, where'er they past,
With blood, fast dripping from their galled limbs—
Blood, and the briny shower of mournful tears.
Look round upon the earth. Where'er he came,
Is blackness and destruction. For the king
Hath a stone heart, unpitying woman-born.
Give council, therefore, unto me, your lord :
How shall we shield our realm, strengthening our hands,
Since Arvan cometh, with the sword of fate,
To waste, and fill with slaughter, as of old ?
Know that he will not spare us, being fierce ;
His thought is to despoil us utterly,
And make us like to the destroyed lands.
What ! shall we tamely fall to him a prey,
Bending our necks to his much-slaying sword,
Even as helpless oxen stand agaze,
When slaughter men make ready for the feast,
Destroying with broad blades made sharp to slay ?
Let us arise and fence our pleasant land,
Loved of the mighty gods, even with our lives.
Should we fear death when the destroyer comes
To mar our homes, wherein we dwelt in peace,

With the consuming rage of unblest fire !
Should we sit still with folded arms, and view
Our sweet wives dragged into captivity,
Our daughters by the foeman's evil touch
Polluted, and our sons slain with the sword !
Such doom be unto cowards, but let us,
Warriors and chieftains, quit us like brave men,
Who know how to endure, and how to die.
Come on then, give wise council in our need :
Where shall we make a stand for this our realm ?”

He ceased, and sat him down, waiting reply
From the great wisdom-council of the West.
Then arose Nar—of all the Western men
Most valiant in the field, good with the sword :
“ When herded wolves,” he said, “ assail the fold,
Where do the shepherds and the white-fanged hounds
Maintain defence ? Wait they in sluggish peace
Till the wild beasts o'er the enclosing walls
Bounding ferocious 'mid the helpless flock,
Rage up and down destroying them at will ?
On the extreme verge of the western lands
Range we our hosts, arraying them for war.
There let us look King Arvan of the sword,
Him and his chiefs, like brave men, in the face,
And where the gods will, let them grant success.
For shame were it to us, we being men
Inured to war, having unshackled hands,
And swords of sharpened steel wherewith to smite,
Suffered we haughty Arvan to destroy ;
To slay one woman or one little child ;
To fire one city, or lay waste one field.—
Is not strength in our hands ? Brave are our hearts.

Let us be even as rocks, moving no whit.
We will destroy King Arvan of the sword,
And give his war-chiefs to the kites and crows ;
Then shall his boasts be seen that they are vain."

These words said Nar, strong wielder of the sword—
Fiercely he spake them, for his wrath was great.
Neither did he regard or wounds, or death,
Or lurking snare, or multitudinous foes,
Seeing he trusted greatly to his blade.

Him answering, Zamoth spake, in council wise ;
Also well able on the peopled plains
To order warlike hosts of armed men.
"Emeth," he said, "great king, ruler of lands !
Also wise men, and warriors, hear my speech.
Nar sayeth good words, being brave of heart.
Truly 'tis ours to guard the sheltering fold
Against King Arvan's wolf-like multitudes.
But where then is the fold-wall, which our swords
Must 'stablish 'gainst all onsets of the foe ?—
The fold-wall is no frontier of the realm,
Uncertain, fancy-traced, unseen of men,
But the great river-water of the West
That as a shield bucklers her northern coasts.
There is our fortress fence. All things beyond
The yellow lapse of its exhaustless waves,
Strong cities, towers of refuge, wood-fringed pass,
Precipitously steep, cliff-girt defiles,
Into whose lap the bright sun, looking down,
Sees not the soil-robe lying far below,
Hid 'neath the furry forests of grey trees,
Even as a woman's glistening silken lap,
In winter time, when snow is on the earth,

Is cloaked with plenteous wealth of hairy skins ;
All these are, as it were, but the rude fringe
Of rough stones, lying round the guarded fold.
Strengthening it somewhat 'gainst the prowling bands.
Yet is the fold more strong. Therefore, great chiefs,
Hear ye my speech. Emeth, thou, too, give heed,
For that my words are wise, even as befits
Speech uttered by a man not young in years,
Nor slack in arms, nor unused to command.
This side the river let us range our war :
For that the stream is as a wall of strength ;
Fenced by its waters we shall yet prevail."

He spake, and Uri sprang forth from the ranks,
Even as a petulant goat, whose teeming front
Buddeth with honours of increasing days,
Springs forth vivacious from the hornèd herd.
Hot was his heart with the fierce fire of youth ;
Nor did he think thoughts, such as the wise gods
Put into men's hearts, favouring whom they love,
Nor did he utter speech of prudent men
Greatly regarded ; for his years were few,
Nor, bee-like labouring, brought they to his brain
Honey of wisdom, hiving with slow toil
The treasured wealth, though his two hands were strong,
And his heart brave, he being prompt to strive.
Thus then spake Uri, "Emeth, king of men,
Warriors and chiefs, should we then sit at ease,
Behind much water waiting for the foe ?
Know ! water shieldeth not a menaced land ;
But valiant hearts, ready to do and die.
Let us go forth unto the further side
Of the great river. There the wide fair plains

Stretch in smooth beauty, fitted to contain
The armed warrior hosts of striving men.
What need we ; having space to smite the foe !
This have the great gods granted to the West,
And for the rest they gave to us our swords,
Them let us use as fitteth valiant men,
Not placing a vain trust in hills or streams ;
Nor in slow counsel, but swift striking steel.
For this same river, if we use its waves,
Let them be as a wall behind the host,
Keeping even coward men from thoughts of flight,
Not as a breast-work, hateful to the brave."

He ceased, with flashing eye and trembling lip,
Quivering with scorn of prudent-thoughted words,
For his hot heart was as a furnace fire,
When the winds smite it, rousing up its wrath
To eat the earthy matter in the ore,
Setting the silver metal free from stain.
Thus Uri's heart, through strength of prudent words,
Glowed greatly, raging with the heat of youth.
To him replying, answered with slow words,
Ethan, the grey-haired chief, with gentle speech
Persuasive, calming Uri's angered soul,
"Valiant art thou, brave Uri, and thy life
Though young in years counteth not glories few,
For where brave men contend, there shines thy sword,
Not slackly toiling, for thy hand is strong.
Yet fear thou not for a diminished strife
If this side of the river we contend.
Since heretofore over the sons of men
King Arvan's sword prevaieth. Every strife
Hath left him victor. Or a magic spell

Is on its blade ; or else the sons of men
O'er-rash, contending bravely without skill,
Have given, all carelessly with foolish hearts,
Them and their lands to Arvan for a prey.
But let us, being prudent, take all thought
Neglecting nothing that becomes wise men,
Who scorn not counsel, though their hearts are brave.
How standeth then the matter in our war ?
If passing o'er the yellow breadth of stream,
We join our battle with the Northern king's,
Where shall we refuge if mischance befall ?
For war is from of old an unsure thing,
The gods delighting much to humble men,
Lest they, in their vain hearts exulting much,
Should quite forget that they are also flesh ;
Sometimes do cause even brave men's hearts to fail,
Sending a panic dread into their souls,
So that they stand no more, but turn and flee.
If then the battle be against our host,
Where shall escape be for us in our need ?
See ! the great river, with its wealth of waves
Will bar retreat, upswallowing many men,
Even all the host whom the red sword hath spared,
But if this side of the abounding stream
We make strong our array ; failing success,
Ours yet are the strong barriers of the hills,
Woods, and steep rocks, precipitous, which things
Are better for defence than walled towns."

He sat him down. And Oren answering said,
Wealthy was Oren, rich in herds and gold,
Trader with ships, studious of slothful ease ;
And much he hated in his craven breast

Brave thoughts of battle. Now, King Arvan's fear
Was on his soul, o'ershadowing all his thoughts,
As a cloud-shadow, flung from fields of air,
Swalloweth, in far spread gloom, cities and hills,
Woods, and the varied stores of pleasant fields.
Thus then spake Oren, fearing in his heart,
"Arvan hath countless hosts of armed men
Against whose strength each land hath warred in vain,
All lifters of the shield, well-trained to strive,
They all are warriors, breaking not their ranks,
Nor holding back their hands, nor fearing death.
How shall our sons, lovers of silken peace,
Buying and selling much, contend with these
In the fierce grapple of man-slaying war?
Come on then; listen unto prudent words.
Vast is the West land, rich in fertile meads,
Also in gold and stores of precious things;
Able to give much, nor perceive the loss.
This therefore let us do, knowing our gain,
Let us array ourselves with speed for war,
Donning our mailed coats, helming our heads,
And girding on our swords. Then let us send
A messenger to Arvan, bearing gifts,
In the one hand a sword made sharp to slay,
And in the other many pleasant things.
Then let him speak to Arvan, saying thus—
'King Arvan, thus saith Emeth of the West,
Thy brother, who would live with thee at peace,
If thou depart, returning on thy ways,
Thine shall be gifts, such as thine eyes behold;
Nor will we say nay, having power to grant.
This if thou wilt not; see the sword is sharp.'"

Thus spake great Oren, wealthiest of the West,
Having a coward heart, desiring peace.
His being herds of cattle, fertile fields,
And wealth more great than misers know in dreams,
Beyond the yellow river of the West,
Much feared Oren therefore in his soul
Lest Arvan, coming with the Northern men,
Would spoil him of his ample heritage.

Him following, Shaul arose, praising his words.
"Good words, saith Oren, counsellor of peace,
For war is hateful to wise-thoughted men,
Shedder of blood, destroyer of man's ease.
This thing consider also, pondering well ;
If strife be between Arvan and the West,
Then must we gather all our strong-limbed men
From out the fields, where bowing toiling backs,
They drive the spade through the black fruitful loam,
And fertilize the earth with tears of sweat.
Also from out the ships of merchandise,
Black-sided, vast, that trample down the waves,
As burly giants tread down the green grass,
Long waving, ripened for the scythe-man's toil,
We must call forth our sturdy sailor bands,
To train them for the shock of armed hosts.
From every city also, where the marts
Hum with the cheerful voice of throngèd life,
Must we call toiling men, busy with thoughts
Gainful, of land-enriching merchandise.
All these men summoned from their lawful tasks,
Forgetful greatly of bread-winning toil,
Must take sharp swords in their unpractised hands,
Striving against King Arvan and his men,

In deathful grapple of destroying strife.
Meanwhile the whole land ceasing from her work,
Shall be as a mere idler in the ways,
While men industrious toil with fitting zeal ;
She sowing nowhere seed of life's grain,
Shall reap no harvest of bright shining gold.
So will her loss be great. This too shall be
Even if she win, driving the Northmen back
Vanquished, despairing, from unravaged plains.
Great even then her mourning, spoiled of wealth,
Which busy labouring hands had elsewhere gained.
But if King Arvan conquer in the strife,
We are despoiled of all ; and as a man,
Once rich, brought down to want from high estate,
Mourneth in poverty, so shall we weep,
Stripped of all things that make this life a joy.
Therefore I say with Oren, Let us rise
And offer, friendly speaking, to the North
Terms fitting, proffering mounds of yellow gold ;
So shall we please, and this, our land, have peace."

Then the unshamefaced ones who feared the fray,
Heartened by Shaul and Oren, rising, spake,
Clamouring, "We will have peace." "What gain is there
If we contend with Arvan of the sword ?
Lo ! every race that rising strove with him
Hath he o'erthrown, wrecking them utterly.
Why should we strive with him to be destroyed ?
We, and our people ? Let us send him gifts.
So shall we meet with favour in his eyes,
And he will grant us pleasant terms of peace."

Thereon Emeth the king arose and spake,
With a pale glare of wrath upon his face,

Like that which glows in iron, heated white
In a great furnace, roused to tenfold heat,
For that his heart was wrath at Oren's words,
At those of Shaul, and of the clamouring herd,
Counselling tame submission to the foe,
And purchasement of craven peace with gold.
Thus said King Emeth therefore, raging fierce,
"Oren, most hateful of all dastard men,
Spokesman of Shaul, and of the coward crew,
Who dare not meet death with a valiant heart,
What a slave art thou, speaker of vain words,
Behold, I spit upon thy words. I hate
Thee and thy fellows, saying evil things.
Hog that thou art, much thinking of thy wash,
And of the brute-beast comforts of thy sty,
Unknowing of the thoughts of nobler men,
Now know that thou art guilty in our eyes ;
Yet if thy peers acquit thee of offence,
Thee, and thy fellow-dastards, craving peace,
Ignoble, bought of Arvan with much gold,
Also with loss of fame, worthier than wealth,
Or lands, or wallèd cities, filled with men ;
Well ! both for thee and them. But if their voice
Condemn thee, speaking sentence of dispraise ;
Dream not thy gains, nor that thy hoary hairs
Shall shield thee, Oren, from a fitting doom ;
Thou and thy fellows shall have due reward."
Then stretching out his hand King Emeth said,
"Oren and others fain would purchase peace
Of Arvan, granting to him weighèd gold,
Also much land and cities full of men ;
Thus bowing them beneath his conquering yoke.

All ye who deem that Oren's thought is just
Abide in peace, sitting upon your thrones.
But ye who do condemn him, rise, stand forth."

Then all the councillors and warrior men
Straightway arose before King Emeth's face,
And stood forth on the plain, showing their doom.
But Emeth, king of nations, spake again,
"Oren, thou now art judgèd, thou and they,
Who with thee would have wrecked their country's fame,
Purchasing quiet plenty with base life.
Ye who have judgèd them guilty, warrior chiefs,
And wise men, show their fate declaring doom."

Then cried they with one voice, answering the word
Of Emeth, the great king: "Let them be slain."
"Arise, and slay them straightway," said the king,
"Traitors they are unto their fathers' land,
Counselling tame submission to the foe.
It is not fitting that such men should live
Drawing the pure air breathed of gods and men."

Thereon the chiefs and stalwart men arose,
Being four hundred, valiant men in fight,
On Oren fell they, and upon his friends,
And with their ponderous swords made sharp to slay,
They smote them on their necks so that they died.

Then from their place came forth the javelin men,
Who, a strong guard, watched round the council plain,
Lest common men, with curious spying eyes,
Should listen to the sayings of the chiefs.
Twelve score and ten were they, strong-sinewed men;
These, coming forward, at the king's command,
Placed through the brodered girdles of the slain
Their own broad sword-belts, made of well-dressed hide,

And dragged their bodies from the grassy mead ;
Each as a horse drags from discumbered fields
The heavy tree-trunks, felled by peasant's axe.

But Emeth, who upon his granite throne,
Had sat unmoving, seeing justice wrought,
With eyes, still as a statue's eyes of stone,
That look straight forward, faltering not at all,
When the last corpse had past beyond his gaze,
Spake to the chiefs and warriors once again.
"The traitors' lives have ceased from off the land,
Their hearts that feared death, in death are cold.
So perish all who love life more than fame,
Forgetful of their country's sacred wealth,
Despisers of her king and of her gods.
But ye, oh ! chiefs, go forth upon your ways ;
Each one unto the task to him assigned
With unslack hand. King Arvan's host is strong ;
His sword is sharp, and he inured to war.
This side the river will we hold the plain ;
For that this strife will be even unto death,
Conquering, we will not spare to smite and slay,
Conquered, scant mercy will the foeman grant.
No vantage ground must we neglect. Must use
All thought, and wise precaution as befits
Men who contend, not idly for renown ;
But who defend their wives and little ones,
Their lands and cities from the sword and flame.
But ye keep up your hearts, and be ye strong ;
Since, for the sword, it may be men speak false,
For the gods gave unto the sons of men
Both lying tongues, and tongues that speak the truth.
But howsoe'er it be, on our side fight

Love of our country, and the gods' great strength,
Which things are mightier than a demon sword.
Fear not for Arvan's threatenings. The just gods
Place fitting boundary to all pride of man.
The falling time comes for the strongest tree,
Lord of the forest, that for circling years
Has with haught head looked o'er the subject woods,
With emerald crest mocking the strength of winds,
And nightly frost, and gathered might of storms.
Also the longest day reaches its close ;
Then the bright sun that rulêd in the heavens,
Through the extended hours much-praised of men,
Stoops to his setting. Thus shall Arvan's power
Cease from the world, when the gods doom his fall.
Therefore, oh ! chieftains, rise. Quit you like men,
Sparing not toil, lavish of thought and blood.
Strive ; and the gods be with us in the strife.

CANTO XII.

GREY twilight glistened dewy in the sky,
And Rhaon's ways were full of seething life ;
For Arvan's host marched on its armed way
Forth through the giant city's southern gates.
Crowds upon crowds thronged the much-peopled street,
Or quickened all the roofs with human life.
Shouts from rejoicing myriads rent the air,
Smiles shone on every face ; no sign of woe,
Or doubt, or fear, spoke of a feeble heart.
Even widows' eyes, seeing an only son
Go forth to war, were all unfilled with tears.
The maiden sent her lover from her side,
Saying, " Be brave, and quit thee like a man."
Wives looked upon their husbands going forth,
Bright faced, as though 'twere to some feast of wine
Whereat wounds were not, nor the fear of death.
Along the uncounted palaces, high waved
Draperies many-hued. The breadth of way
Before the weaponed men gleamed green with boughs,
Strewed triumph-wise for their advancing feet.
It was as though not unto dubious strife,
But unto sure success the great king moved ;
For victory had smiled on him so long,
Scarcely the wisest dreamed of near defeat.
No, not even one, who saw the stream of steel

Flow through the city's gates, on either side
Hemmed in by palaces, whose glorious walls
Confined, like marble banks, war's iron tide,
Foreboded sorrow. For to all it seemed
As if all weaponed forces must fail to shake
The iron strength of those war-established files,
Numberless as blue waves, that through some strait,
Driven by the North wind, pass unceasing on.
The Sun, that rose upon their marching forth,
Looked setting on the black continuous line
Still pressing onward. Through the silent night
The star-gods, each upon his silver throne
Calm seated, viewed with their regardful eyes
The armed advance of marching multitudes.
Again the Sun arose, once more he sank,
Like a gold-mailed warrior on the plain,
After a battle, dyeing the wide earth
With the red life-stream. Yet again the night
Fled past with silent lapse of purple wings.
The third Sun rose on Arvan's armed array,
Nor shone when outward passed the rearmost guard
To join fresh hosts camped on the outer plains.
What wonder that the people in their hearts
Considering, believed such warrior strength
Was as the might of the Immortal Ones?
What wonder even if Arvan's watchful eyes,
Wiser than theirs, flashed with stern soldier-joy,
Presaging triumph, whilst the warriors passed?
For from the day when the adorned earth
Was, by the careful fingers of the gods,
Clothed most curiously in cunning work,
And laid, even as a kingly child, fair robed

In many-tinted, silken needlework,
Upon the holy bosom of the deep ;
Even to these days, when men, with iron pens,
Grave on fair tablets, made of beechen wood,
Record of former years, no eyes of earth
Gazing, have gazed on hosts so vast of men.
Slowly they marched o'er the wide-reaching plains
Subject to Arvan's sway. Where'er they passed—
Though at his bidding, men with busy hands
Had made of all the cities of the plain
Granaries, storing them with provender ;
Grain as the drops of water in the sea,
Which man's thoughts have not measured ; meat and wine
As though all herds that feed on green, cool grass,
And every skin, full of the blood of grapes,
Had there been gathered for the army's need—
Yet was food lacking, for the host was great.
So, where it passed, it ate up all the lands ;
Even as a locust swarm in southern climes,
Descending from the heavens, sent of the gods,
Wastes all the earth, leaving no blade of grass,
No leaf upon the trees. Thus on their way
The armies of King Arvan passed along,
Bequeathing famine to the up-eaten lands.
The wells sufficed not for their clamorous needs ;
The rivers shrank within their arid beds,
Drained by the multitudes of thirsting lips ;
And emptiness was, wheresoe'er they came.—
One moon had waned, since through great Rhaon's
gates
King Arvan and his warriors issued forth.
The host had passed the marge of cultured earth,

Into the forest world, where pinewoods vast
Beard all the mountains with their unshorn strength ;
There as the weapon-bearers onward toiled,
Through the all-desolate region, many failed,
Outhungered ; for the stores sufficed not,
Though vast to nourish. Thus men's hearts were glad,
When, from the margin of the lightless woods,
They looked once more upon wide-peopled plains,
On ploughèd earth, and cities fair of men.
Thence onward through the West king's populous lands,
Not lacking aught, they marched, taking all food
That pleased them, letting the people die.

And thus did Arvan in the fertile lands
As he moved onward seeking Emeth's face.
When that he came unto a walled town,
He did as in old days, where'er he came.
If that the city opened at once her gates,
Brass-studded, ponderous, and received him straight,
He made the people subject to his laws,
Sparing their lives ; but he destroyed their town,
And sent them wealthless to the wintry North.
Only their freedom yet remained to them,
They being not compelled to wear the chain.
But if the city would not open her gates,
He fought against it till it was o'erthrown.
Then all the aged women and the men
They smote unsparing with well-sharpened swords ;
But all the young men and the long-haired girls,
Stript of their robes, a greatly mourning crew,
Were hurried, howling, to captivity,
Cursing their fate, they being made a prey.

So through the land, wasting where'er they moved,

They passed unto the river of the West,
The giant stream, that rolls its wealth of waves,
Earth-yellowed, onward to the Western main.
There paused King Arvan's warriors, for they marked,
Ranged on the further bank, banners and men,
And on the mountain side the light of steel,
Twinkling amid the forests, as the gleam
Of numberless stars upon a frosty night,
Falls frequent through the black wind-chasmed clouds.
Thereon the chiefs divined the Western king
Thought with his armed array to hold the stream,
And took war-counsel how to pass the wave,
Seeing their path must now be won by steel.

Now the great river, ere it flings its strength
Over the rocks in headlong cataract,
Rending its path 'twixt the wave-riven hills,
Wherethrough it strives to the desired main,
Even as a hot heart, maddened by desire,
Struggles toward possession, spreads abroad
Its golden waters o'er the level lands,
Sea-like in vastness. There the current steals
With scarce perceived flow, the while the flood
Is jewelled over with unnumbered isles,
That break the watery distance 'twixt the shores.
Then, after counsel taken, all the chiefs
Bade Arvan's warriors fell uncounted pines
In the surrounding forest. This they did
Through many days. On every lofty stem
Rang the well-sharpened axes till the tree
Tottered, and flung on the affrighted earth
Its stately form and emerald diadem.
Swiftly adown the tributary streams

They floated them on the river's breast ;
There formèd they from isle to isle a bridge
Gigantic, resting upon many rafts.

But the great West king, when he knew their will,
Sent all his slingers and his archer men
To foil their purpose with the ceaseless sleet
Of well-aimed shafts and hail of pebble stones ;
Yet nought effected. Arvan's archers lay
Close ambushed in the woods on every isle,
And drove the opposing foemen from the bank.
Therefore with ease they stretched the floating road
'Twixt isle and isle, close linking them throughout.

But when they left the outmost islands' shades,
And drew anigh unto the Western shore,
The labourers toiling toward the further land
Made but scant progress ; for the arrow storm
Destroyed them at their task, till all the bridge
Was choked with dead and dying, and all the planks
Grew red and slippery, and the frequent splash
Of falling bodies vexed the grievèd stream.
Therefore the soldiers built them osier shields,
Strong plaited, fenced with hides, exceeding broad,
Behind whose breadth of shelter they might toil,
Unharassed by the archers. Fast the rain
Of shafts struck on the man-made wall, and fell
Harmless into the stream, till the brown wave
Was mantled by a spreading veil of shafts,
Close-laced like water-weeds. Still the bridge grew,
A spreading darkness, o'er the tawny stream,
Even as a cloudy bar grows o'er the sky,
Yellowed with the first radiance of the day.
Then through the alarmèd air the javelins sped,

Red-tipped with flaming tow. Some idly fell,
Loud hissing in the waves. Others clung close
To the hide-shields, involving them in flame.
Full often, wrapt around with blinding smoke,
The structure showed to gazing eyes a wreck ;
Yet with great toil the Northmen quenched the fire.
And the bridge grew ; and now scant space remained
Between them and the shore. Then Arvan's chiefs
Bade men that they should frame a platform huge,
Of massive timber. Raised aloft in air
By ropes of hide, upon the edge secured
Of the broad pier, they bound it with huge chains :
So waited for the dawn, when they should cleave
The twisted ropes, bidding the drawbridge fall.
Then through the night of gloom the stormers passed,
Massing on every isle with prudent care :
There waited, watching for the Sun's first ray,
When they should move at Arvan's word, to die.

He came, lord of the heavens, and of the earth
Grass-clad, home of the race of flesh-robed men,
In his imperial splendour, in fair garb
Of crocus light arrayed—calm beyond thought ;
Shedder of comforting light over the lands,
Ripener of fruits ; bidding the blade spring forth,
The trees assume more stately garbs of green ;
Wakening the flowers from out their pleasant sleep,
Calling the birds to sing his sovereign praise,
And men to lift up thankful hearts to him
Who clothes the fertile vales with golden grain,
Feeder of all earth's hungry multitudes—
Birds of the air, beasts, and bread-eating men.
No sadness dimmed his shining countenance,

Nor quenched the light of his immortal eyes,
Though now he called to carnage, not to joy.
For, through all changes that afflict men's souls,
He, seated on his throne, remains the same,
Nor doth he grieve with men, being a god.

Now Irach, standing on the outmost isle,
Took thought, commanding all the warrior-toil.
He bade the strong men part the ropes of hide
That held the drawbridge high-upraised in air.
Then with a crash it fell, with iron fangs,
Even like to iron teeth, garnished beneath ;
Wherewith it bit into the yielding bank,
Even as a river-beast's descending jaw,
Drives the keen jagged teeth into a prey.
Scarce had it fallen, when the fierce northern men
In one dense column stormed toward the shore.

But on the bank the West-men, watching well,
Saw the advancing thunder-cloud of war,
And stood with ready weapons prompt to strive.
Their host, when rose the sun, held all the plains
Between the pineclad mountains and the wave,
Strong unto battle, men unused to fly ;
For Emeth's best were in the opposing ranks,
Led of his chosen chiefs ; some swift to hurl
The javelins, piercing through the foeman's shield ;
Some strong with iron sword to cleave the helm,
And make its warrior wearer bite the dust ;
Some mightiest to swing the brazen club,
Crunching the bruised life from the battered form ;
All valiant men, skilful, well-used to slay.

Then rose the cry of battle in the air,
A long confused noise from many throats.

For at the first the Northmen forced their way,
They being Arvan's chosen, very brave,
Through the thronged foes on to the reedy shore.
Soon did the West-men, rallying with a shout,
Strong in unnumbered multitudes of men,
Filled full of hot shame for their backward steps,
Charge forward fiercely o'er the mounded dead,
Till the North warriors bowed beneath the shock,
And the armed foes gained footing on the bridge.
There as they, pressing forward, with great swords
Smote down the Northmen, with resounding splash
The brass clad bodies plunged into the stream ;
As by the margin of a pleasant lake
The towering trees, felled by the workman's axe,
Falling, dash high in air the glittering wave.
Then from the isle fresh hordes of Northern men,
Charging o'er dead and dying, cleared the way,
Hurling the foe far up upon the plain.

So through the day before the trembling planks
The striving hosts swung heavily to and fro,
Till the shore's guardians grew outworn with strife.
For the reserves, far back upon the hills,
Lay massed on every mountain, every pass,
Nor helped them reeling from repeated blows.
It was as when a mighty steel-shod beam
Is rudely urged against the foeman's wall.
First the strong fabric bends, then yields apace
To the rough storm of blows that ceaseless hail
* Upon the crumbled stones. So did the West
Reel from the shore, whilst Arvan's hosts drew on.

Thus, when the sun declined, shewed the dread strife
Beside the bridge of death. But while the roar

Of battle spread along the reedy bank,
Nardon, with ordered fleets of many skiffs,
Traversed the yellow water of the stream,
Gaining unseen an undefended earth,
Where the thick forests and steep mountain cliffs
Impending, hid them from the foeman's view.
Silent they climbed the mountain with all speed,
Steep, so that thence the West feared not assault,
So left it all unfenced, save by a crowd
Of light-armed men, who held the summit rocks,
Them Nardon, pressing swiftly to the crest,
Charged and dispersed ; then raised the battle shout,
Storming against the foe's surprisèd flank.
In heaps their warriors fell. The rest, amazed,
Drew to the left their shattered files away,
And slowly faltered backward from the plain.

When Sesis, watching with the Western war,
Perceived how down the mountain's wooded slopes
Nardon the Slayer came, vast as a cloud
Whose broad feet stand upon the hill's green breast,
Whose stormy crest towers far aloft in heaven.
His heart within him bounded like a frog
That, being frightened by a passer's foot,
Leaps with a sudden swiftness from the earth.
Yet, being brave, he took no thought of flight,
But, drawing swift his great sword from the sheath,
And swinging his broad shield before his breast,
He threw himself before his wavering men,
Them thus exhorting, "Lo ! the time is come,
Oh Western men, when each may show his worth,
And whether he, within his hairy breast,
Holdeth a heart, lover of this his land ;

For now black Nardon down the mountain slopes
Comes with great swiftness, purposing to slay.
Ye, therefore, fling your shields before your breasts,
And plant your feet firm upon this your land,
Knowing it is the land which gave you birth.
What, shall these robbers spoil you of your own?
Be valiant therefore, playing still the man.
Shall we then fear, though Nardon's club be great,
And his dark head stands high as doth a pine's,
That, haughtily rising, towers above the earth.
Not so; but we will meet him on his path,
Taming his pride, as fitteth men of war."

Thus speaking, Sesis strode before his men,
Lifting his shield, moving to meet the foe.

But Nardon, when he marked him, with disdain
Shot angry fire, from 'neath his bushy brow,
Out of his savage eyes, him scorning much.
"Who then art thou?" he cried, "thou puny thing
That, daring, meetest Nardon, with the sword.
Art thou a warrior, or some peasant lad,
Who having privily stolen his master's glaive,
Audacious masked in unaccustomed arms,
Mocketh the dangers of grim-visaged war.
But fling thy weapon down, even with haste,
Submitting thee, or I will strike thee dead."

Him Sesis answered. "When the fray begins
Should a man boast? Wait till the battle's close,
Then shall be known who from the strife survives;
For often boasters are not conquerors.
Singer of triumph-songs before the fight,
Know fate may haply mock, dooming thy fall."
He spake, and springing high up in the air

He struck at Nardon with his two-edged sword,
And smote the giant on the shoulder-blade ;
But he reeled backward heavily from the blow,
Staggering confused, till on his club of war
He stayed himself. And Sesis struck again
And smote him on the side ere he was ware ;
For Nardon, vast of form, was slow of thought,
Nor moved swiftly, even though great the need,
Till rage had fired him and his heart grew hot.
Howbeit Sesis' blow glanced from the hide
That thickly folded fenced the warrior's loins,
And Nardon turned and smote him with his club,
Angrily with all strength upon the helm ;
Then the steel helm broke, like a bubble bright,
When a boy, striking, smites it with a stick ;
And Sesis fell down senseless on the earth.
So Nardon lifted up his club again,
Thinking to smite at Sesis, where he lay.
This had he done, but ere the fatal blow
Descending closed in gloom the chieftain's life,
Swift through the air hissed Sesthel's gleaming lance,
And struck loud-clashing upon Nardon's breast.
Deep through the breast-plate fenced with iron rings,
Struck the steel head, and pierced the hide beneath,
And rent the warrior's garb, grazing the skin.
But he stood still a moment in his place,
While Sesthel sprang to smite him with the sword.

Then Nardon's men soon as they marked the gleam
Of Sesthel's sword, leapt forth to shield the chief ;
So grew the strife confused ; while overmatched,
Sesthel and all his warriors from the field
Were beaten back still slowly giving ground.

But Nardon's war-club in the general whirl
And tumult of the madly eddying strife,
Struck down the ranks of men, as with a wand
A peasant lad passing through meadow lands,
Down by the fertile margin of a stream,
Smiteth to earth the tall wave-nourished flowers.

Then Arna stood up, being moved at heart,
Seeing the ravage wrought by Nardon's hand,
And went forth to resist him with the sword,
Thus then he spake, "Oh ! Nardon, famed in strife,
Cease from the herd, nor slaughter them at will,
For lo ! the herdsman comes, a worthier foe."
He said, and stooping low his plumèd crest,
He rushed at Nardon, covering his head
With the full-orbèd many-hidèd shield.
Even as a bull he came, that o'er the earth
Comes with great swiftness, spurning up the dust
By the great beatings of his hornèd hoofs ;
So Arna came, and with his sword of war
He sought to stab great Nardon to the heart.
But Nardon smote the shield and beat it down,
And with the blow Arna bent down to earth,
Kneeling upon his knee, and ere he rose
Nardon's black club struck heavily Arna's breast,
And Arna fell down, dying, on the plain,
Whilst his brave soul went forth to meet white death,
Even as a little child, with confident heart,
Goeth with outstretched arms and speeding feet
Uncertain, tottering greatly as he goes,
To meet his father back returning home.

Now when the Westmen saw brave Arna dead,
They fled precipitate towards the hills.

Then the victorious host along the shore
Encamped, raising great watch-fires numberless,
That blazed through the thick darkness of the night,
Frequent as stars upon the plains of heaven.
Around over the plain the dead men lay
In lakes of blood, still in their cold right hands
Clenching their battle weapons. Wounded sore,
Warriors at intervals raised feeble wails
Of lamentation ; or deep groans of pain,
Spoke of life-wasting anguish. Yet their cries
Were all unheeded ; gathered round the blaze
The warmen sat, and feasted full on flesh,
Or drank the blood-red wine ; shouting high praise
Unto the mighty Sun, who ruling heaven,
Had given the victory unto their hands ;
Or lauding the clear light of some bright god,
Some holy star, who, through wind-riven rents
In the fast-gathering tempest-clouds, looked down
On the triumphant myriads of the North.
Thus did the smiters with the sword rejoice
Through the long hours of the dusk-robèd night ;
While other myriads yet, outworn with strife,
With slumber-sealèd eyes, lay on the earth
Mute as the corpses on the battle plain.

So past the night over the Northern hosts ;
But when the dawn again above the hills
Rose blushing, then once more the steel-clad crowds
Stood all along the plains, ready to march
Against the foemen camped upon the hills,
And drive them from their wood-fenced fortresses.

Soon on his war-horse, white as driven snow,
Or the fresh foam that the great ocean wave,

Heaving with storms o'erblown, lays glistening pure
On the grey pebbles of the Western shore,
King Arvan rode along the iron lines.
From under eyebrows, bushy with much hair,
He shot the searching glance of living fire
That warriors love ; the glance that instant marks
All things that appertain to martial toil,
Marking defect with blame, fitness with praise.
Around him were his chosen warriors, chiefs
Like unto gods, divinest among men.
Braver than bulls, despising thoughts of death.
But Arvan, ere he gave the sign to wake
Once more the dormant strife, raised high his hand,
Pointing unto the hills, where, twinkling bright,
Innumerable lights of glancing steel,
Like glittering blossoms, gleamed among the boughs,
'Then spake unto the soldiers cheering words.
" Warmen," he said, " ye are where the foe stood
But yester eve ; to-night, rest where they stand.
Are ye not Arvan's bravest ? Sharp your swords,
Your souls true as of old, exceeding brave,
With a great courage such as passeth speech,
Shall the foe stand to mock us on the hills ?
Go up, and smite them quickly, sparing not."

High rose their answering acclaim in air—
" Send forth thy servants, Lord." The roar of sound
Rolled thunderous, far o'er the level lands,
And at their stations on the topmost hills
Alarmed the foe, so that they sprang to arms,
And stood with swords unsheathed, and shields prepared.

Then Arvan spoke the word. " Go forth," he cried,
" Returning swiftly with the West king's head."

And even as if the host were but one man,
Urged by one will, obedient to one brain,
The steel-clad wedges o'er the level ground
With linked shields moved onward to the hills.
It was as when the ocean, on the flood,
Rising with azure waves, with gathered might
Hurls all its waters on the sky-crowned cliffs.
Steadfast they went as to assured success :
Triumph's red sign was yet upon their swords,
Their hearts were strengthened in them, and they said
One to the other, as they onward drew,
"See ye the deer close-herded in their woods?
Soon shall the hunters drive them from the shade."

But as the seawave on the precipice
Breaks idly, moving not the solid mass,
Even by an hair's breadth ; so the leaguèd might
Of Arvan's hosts, upon the wood-fenced heights,
Broke all successful ; for the wary foe
Had strengthened every vale with mounded earth.
And barred the forest's ways with levelled trees,
Behind whose wooden rampart, strong of heart,
They mocked the efforts of the warriors' charge ;
Nor watched they idly from their vantage-ground,
But sent the sleet of arrows from above,
Thinning the foemen's ranks with frequent deaths.
Fast fell the chiefs before the unseen foe ;
Though yet the host strove, through the summer day,
To gain a footing on the nearest hills.
Repulse awaited them. Each valley teemed
With armed men, and every mountain crest
Was as a fortress. Therefore from the field,
Discomfited, at eventide they drew,

Leaving their bravest dead, earth on the earth.

So through four days of strife they sought to force
The wall of steel that barred their onward way ;
Yet nought prevailed ; for the sword undrawn,
Though yet in Arvan's host, brought not success,
Even to its wearer, in the reeling strife ;
And Arvan, who had conquered in its might,
Was now as other men. He, when he saw
Success ungranted as in olden days,
Began to doubt. But as the fourth day fell,
And dusky night involved in shade the plain,
Though yet the summit of the wooded hills
Shone sunset-red, a fear fell on the North ;
For suddenly upon their utmost flank,
Where Esthli stood, and Lygrul, chiefs of fame,
The foe prevailed, and Arvan's men gave way,
Pressed on too hardly. Then the boldest shrank
From the unequal strife. Wildered, confused,
The chiefs, all order lost, withdrew their ranks,
In wildest disarray, towards the plain.

There to King Arvan, while he watching sat
Upon his steed, ruling, although from far,
The tide of fight, strengthening the failing line
With speedy succours, came a messenger,
Breathless with speed, with panic-stricken eyes.
"Fly ! my lord king," he cried, "the day is lost.
Esthli, with all the array of eastern men,
Hath fallen to the foe. Thy host is left
With unfenced flank, ope to each rude attack.
Now may their well-ground swords, with onset fierce,
Through the unarmoured side of thine array
Strike, piercing even to its inmost heart.

Therefore the chiefs beseech thee, 'Spare thy life,
Gaining the isle. Already their advance
Tempestuous darkens o'er the nearest hills.'"
"Fly!" shouted Arvan with a face of scorn;
"And who art thou, who, daring, counsellest flight
Unto King Arvan, wielder of the sword—
Who through the years, slaying where'er he moved,
Hath passed at will, slaughtering the sons of men?—
Back, coward, to the ranks! Say, 'Arvan comes!—
Surely, thou lingering, I will smite thee dead!'"
He spake, loosening the great sword in the sheath,
As though swift action followed on the word.

Back turned the messenger upon his path,
Swift as a javelin from a warrior's hand,
Fearing the monarch's 'wrath. But Arvan thought,
"My name in old days was a tower of strength;
Victory waited on my gleaming sword,
Even as a slave. Hath my great warrior strength
Ebb'd from me, that my chieftains counsel flight?
Am I not Arvan, that my bravest fear?
Surely the battle yet will know my sword—
The foe be trodden down into the dust!"

Then hastily to Irach sent he words,
Bidding him bring with speed the Northern men,
Flower of the host, who waited on the plains,
Held back from conflict with the unseen foe
Till the slow hours should bring the expected time
When their sure swords might seal the victory.
Them did King Arvan summon in his need,
Hurling them, led of Irach, on the foe;
Whilst with his guard, all chosen men of war,
Wild stormed he through the chasm their swords had made

In the foe's ranks, turning the battle-tide
By that great charge ; so that they backward drew
Once more into their ramparts on the hills.

Swift fell the night. Warriors, upon their shields
Resting their heads, slept through the hours of gloom,
As though they slumbered in a land of peace.
But Arvan watched with unrefreshèd eyes,
Waiting the advent of the summoned chiefs,
Lygrul and Irach, leaders of the host.

Then to the monarch, as within his tent
He sat unpanoplied, with rage of heart
Waiting the day dawn to renew the fight,
A messenger, outworn with weariness,
Through the long way, was by the soldiers brought.
Now Arvan marked the man's distress of mind,
That did refuse him speech ; and to him said,
" Speak forth thy terror, slave ! Why show thine eyes
Oppressèd with a horror of great fear ?
Why sits despair upon thine anguished brow ?
Utter thy thought ! My heart is unafraid,
Not shrinking from thy tidings." " Oh, my lord,"
Said he with faint, weak voice, " pardon thy slave,
Whose mouth unwilling speaketh evil things !—
Revolt, within thy kingly capital,
Sways o'er the fickle hearts of changeful men.
Thy royal palace is a blackened wreck ;
Thy children's blood is on the rebel sword,
Their fair heads roll in the defilèd dust."

And Arvan rose with staring eyes of flame,
Unknowing that he did, oping his mouth,
Yet uttering naught, for that his wrath was great.
But as the life power once more in his heart

Awakened, on the man, with sudden rage,
He leapt, even as a panther on its prey,
Crying, "Thou liest, slave!" So, with his hand
Unarmoured, on his head he struck one blow,
Stretching him senseless on the quivering earth.
A moment passed. Then to the warrior men,
Who stood around with awestruck eyes of fear,
He said: "Drag forth the slave! Call Irach straight,
Prince of the nation, foremost sword in fight.
Say to him, 'Arvan claims thine utmost speed.'"

Soon Irach, entering, stood before his lord,
He too with a great sadness in his face;
So that King Arvan's heart perceived the truth,
Even ere his mouth had questioned, "Thou hast heard—
Spake the slave truth?" "My lord! oh, noblest king!
Warcrowned above all other kings on earth!—
Truth spake the slave. Then hearken to my word,
Sparing thy life. Treason within thy camp
Hath raised her treacherous head; and in thy land
Rebellion riseth like an untamed flood,
All homes o'erspreading. Lose not thy fair life
In armed conflict with a mightier foe.
Return unto thy realm. Beat with strong hand
All traitors down. Renew thy shattered strength,
I and thy chieftains will delay the march
Of the victorious foe, till thou fresh hosts
Hast gathered to resist their onward way.
Fear not swift progress for them. O'er my corse
Shall they advance, ere they pollute our soil
With wasteful trampling of their unblest feet."

But Arvan answering not, save to his thought,
Questioning Irach, said, "Is the slave dead?"

“Not dead, my lord, oh, king ! but smitten sore,
Myself spake to him ere I sought thy tent.”

“Bid him return,” said Arvan. Then the slave,
Obedient came, low bending to his lord,

“Ill did I, striking thee,” said the great king,

“Thou spakest truth, and did'st deserve reward,
Though bringing evil tidings. Fear thou not,

For the ill tale came on me unawares ;

Therefore my fury rose against thy life,

But now my heart is strong. Show thou the truth

Unfearing, hiding nothing from my soul.

Shalt thou not have a kingly recompense ? ”

Then the slave spake to him, concealing nought,

“My lord, oh, king ! Sudden revolt arose

Within the city. Many armed men

Fell to the mutineers. The eastern slaves,

Storming the palace, slew the scanty guard,

Then swept with fire and sword throughout its halls,

Sparing within no soul that drew life-breath,

From the grey-haired man to the sucking child.”

“Know'st thou what mutinous chiefs led the revolt ? ”

Said Arvan, holding down his rage and grief,

Even as a giant by his sinewy strength,

Presseth to earth a leopard of the hills.

“Men spake of Zular ; and a doubtful word

Passed through the maddened multitude of slaves,

That Chavah had arisen from the dead,

Leading her race to triumph. Yet I deem

The tale unsure ; in that I saw her not.”

Then Arvan cried to the guards, who came

Obedient. After to the messenger

He spake calm words. “'Tis well, thou may'st go.”

Then to the soldiers, "Lead him forth in peace.
Give to him food and gold, also a garb
Well-woven, purple, wrought by cunning hands,
As is most meet for men honoured of kings.
Wrong did I, smiting him." Low bowed the slave ;
Then, with the armed men, he went his way.

But Arvan sat one instant very still ;
After, he spake to Irach asking words.
"Why tarries Lygrul ? Am I king no more,
That mine own chieftains thus despise my word ?"
Then answered Irach, "Lygrul late was seen
In the fierce heat of conflict ; but he strove
On the foe's side, against thy sons, oh, king !
For that his heart within him is corrupt,
Compelling him to treason 'gainst his lord."
"He hath turned traitor fitly," said the king.
Loaded he was with favours. It is meet
I should reap such reward. No Northman he,
But one who, having been a bitter foe,
I would have won to friendship. All too late
Learn I that love on earth may not be bought,
Nor foes made friends with mercy. Where hate's fire
Hath been, distrust should watch it evermore."

He ceased a moment, thinking heavy thoughts,
For that the wreck was great ! Then once again
He oped his lips, slow uttering steadfast words.
"Irach, the gods' hands press upon me sore.
Athreh is dead, and Chavah dead or false.
The sword is lost. Lygrul hath fled the host,
Being a traitor. All the Eastern troops,
Led by false-hearted Esthli of the bow,
Have fallen to their kindred in the strife,

And war beside them. Victory, that hath clung
Long to my banners, smileth on the foe.
My race is quenched in blood. Many fair sons
And daughters were my own. But their bright heads
Lie in the dust : for in my kingly halls
Rebellion, sitting armed, hath made a waste.
And all things are against me. Yet remains
My own soul true, though in the heart of wreck,
Stronger than stone or steel. Said'st thou but now
I should return ? Irach, I will not fly.
A king should fall or conquer. Shall I live
To hear men say they looked on Arvan's back,
While he fled from them like a beaten hound,
That runs and yelps in terror through the streets.
They shall not say it, I yet drawing breath.
Living or dying, I will face the foe.
Call ye my chieftains, for night wanes apace,
And we must dare the strife once more at dawn.
I conquer or I die. What life is that
Which men live all apart from warrior fame,
Drawing not, through their nostrils, breath of strife,
Nor smiting with the sword, nor slaying men ?
Such life be to my foes ; but unto me
May the gods, favouring me, grant battle-joys,
Or the calm quiet of sleep-rounded death.

CANTO XIII.

DARK dawned the day. Clouds covered all the heavens
With sombre shrouds. The bright sun hid his face,
As though he loathed to look on Arvan's grief.
Fast fell the sleety rain, wind-urgèd on,
Veiling the hills, and deluging the plain
With unexhausted store of watery drops.
With dripping crests and dew-distilling cloaks,
The men—their bright arms soiled—watched mournfully
The cold, grey glimmer creeping up the East;
The great war-horses in each well-soaked limb
Shivered. The banners clung around their poles,
Drenched by the storm, like unto sodden rags;
And all the martial splendour of the host
Seemed wholly quenched by that remorseless storm.
But other things than splendour, too, had past
From Arvan's arms amid the night of gloom.
Weary with the long night watch, shelterless,
Beaten upon by tempest, being yet
Faint and cast down by days of dubious strife,
And thought of present treason, warrior hearts
Became as water. Each man when he looked
Upon his comrades' face saw fireless eyes
And cheeks unlighted by the hope of strife,
Then his heart was within him as a stone.

The footmen gazed on their unshining swords,
Blunt with much striking, and their eyes grew dull,
Hoping not triumph for them. On the plain
The arrow-darters sat, and moaned in heart
Over the drenchèd plumage of their shafts,
And o'er the bow-strings, which replied no more
Unto the summons of their masters' hands ;
For evil was on their war instruments.
The crystal-spherèd children of the cloud,
The rain drops, toiling through the dusky hours,
Had wrought great havoc in the archer host,
Making their bow-strings slack. Unmartial gloom,
O'ermastering the joy of nearing strife.
Weighed upon every heart. Even the great chiefs
Showed untriumphant. Arvan's face alone
Wore a great calmness, looking like a rock
That quailèth not, though buffeted by storms :
For in his heart he had made pact with death,
Nor fearèd coming evil, though the days
Were sweeping down on him, laden with wrecks
Of all his soul had loved ; as on a man,
Standing alone upon a flood-girt rock,
The fierce rain-swollen wave swoops raging down,
Bearing within its clasp his ruined home,
And bodies once beloved. So doth his heart,
Made strong through anguish, face, unflinching, fate.
Thus Arvan, his life-treasure lost, was strong,
He only, strong, though myriads waited round ;
For all their hearts, numbed by discouragement,
Beat faint, and even their bravest feared defeat.

Now on the plains the king arrayed his men
Prudently wise. Far on the flanking hills

The archers and the slingers ambushed lurked,
Guarding the outspread hosts' unfenced sides.
Them Noak led, and Ahr good with the sling,
Also well-skilled to lift the shining sword.

Fronting the foes, who edged the extremest plain,
The light-armed javelin darters spread their lines,
With woven corslets fenced and osier shields ;
These Odan ruled, having seen much of strife,
Now also had he fought a worthy war,
Having been wounded sorely on the eve,
When he essayed to bar the onward march
Of the triumphant foe towards the stream.
Then had he striven with the steel-tipped dart,
Smiting down many men, so that they died.
But Esril of the West, with shining blade,
Smote off his javelin's head. Then Odan turned,
Being weaponless, having no time to draw
From off his thigh the great, hide-sheathed sword,
And fled with speedy steps over the plain.
Yet, as he turned, Esril, with hasting glaive,
Smote Odan sore on the shield-bearing arm,
And wounded him, wherefore he dropt the shield,
And now stood shieldless in the foremost war,
Wounded, yet willing still to strive and smite.

Anigh to Odan, Nardon's evil swarms,
Their multitudes still vast, though thinned with death,
Spread in dense myriads, covering the land.
Nor had they lost desire of war and strife.
Though fallen many of their warrior-men ;
Seeing their hearts were savage in their breasts,
Having no feeling for the dead, nor love
Such as doth bind the nations man to man ;

But each man of their tribes lived for himself,
Nor heeded others' wounds, disease, or death,
Rejoicing in his own unminished strength.

Behind them, threatening as a thunder-cloud,
Where Irach, sword in hand, ruled the long line,
Riding beside King Arvan, king of men,
The ironclad array of close-massed men
Stood, each with spear in hand and helm on head,
And well-poised shield. In massive sable blocks,
Even like to black-walled fortresses, they stood.

Yet farther to the rear, in squadrons ranged,
But each alone, having free space to move,
The scythe-set chariots lurked in order meet,
Blocking each interval as with a chain
Of thrice-wrought steel. But to the right and left,
Where the wide plain touched on the outmost hills,
Unnumbered horsemen watched the advancing foe,
Clouds upon clouds, vast as the masses huge
Of turbulent vapour, which the warm West wind
Calls up continuous on the fields of heaven.
These were to wait the moment when the West
Should, reeling in the conflict, seek retreat.
Then should they, striking with their well-ground
steel,

Spread wild confusion in the unordered ranks.
Ervar the son of Irach to the right,
And Gylar to the left, ordered their hosts.

Now, when King Arvan's army in its strength
Stood duly ranged on the stream-margined plain,
Waiting the foe's advance to smite and slay,
There came a calm over the man-filled mead ;
Such calm as cometh, ere the thunder-cloud,

Filling the vaulted heavens with clamorous sound,
Opens her hundred mouths, forth spewing fire.

Soon, far away among the distant hills,
Arose a voice of cheering, a faint sound.
Confused, like the rustle among leaves
In the green forest, ere the tempest's might
Wakes in its strength. So from the woodfenced heights
King Emeth came with all his valiant men,
Each marching on his ways, delaying not.
Fierce was the fateful shock. The ordered line
Of javelin-darters quivered, yet remained
After the onset even where first it stood ;
For that the men were brave, like unto gods ;
Also each heart knew 'twas the closing strife,
That should decide their life-fate and the king's,
And struck as to escape the clutch of doom.
It was as when a land-flood, mountain-born,
Hurleth its strength against a man-made wall,
Built of great blocks of stone strong to endure.
Mighty the water-rush, that makes the fence
Tremble convulsive, shaken by the assault
Even to its deep foundation ; yet it stands,
And the wave falls back shattered. Thus the charge
Of Emeth's warriors failed ; and Arvan's men
Cheered till the cry reached to the heart of heaven,
Glad in their souls for force yet undecayed,
And hopeful much of triumph yet to be.

But as the water, hurling wave on wave,
Much shaking, mines at length the stalwart wall ;
So, tottering, with a great roar it falls
In much confusion, swallowed in the tide.
Thus, worn by Emeth's oft-repeated charge,

Heavily strained, the line at length gave way ;
Nor could great Odan stay the warrior men,
Though, speaking words, he heartened them to war,
Saying, " Fight on ! fight on ! ye men of war.
Lo ! succour cometh to us from the rear.
Our country calls us !—let us stand and strive !"
Then with his spear he beat unto the earth
Uta and Anan where they led the war—
Both chiefs of mighty fame, strong in the strife,
Yet did they drop their shields when Odan smote,
And on the earth downfalling, groaned and died.

Then for a breathing-space the warrior West
Paused, being discomfited. But Uri sprang
With speed of foot ; for that his heart was hot,
Seeing those chieftains slain by Odan's spear.
Thus then he cried unto the men of war,
" Come on, ye warriors, wearers of the sword,
Lest in the Westland we endure reproach
Returning home. See Odan's spear is red
With Western blood. Shall we not tame his pride
O'erthrowing him." Thereon the armed men
Charged, led of him, on Odan : and the chief,
Though smiting, was borne backward o'er the field
Sore-wounded ; but his men, high in their arms
Upbearing Odan, from the wrath of war
Fled backward, swift as foam before the gale,
Chased by the sharpened edge of Uri's sword.

Thus did the light-armed Northmen fly the field.
But o'er the fallen surged the victor host,
Mad with the furious joy of great success,
To meet the iron ranks dense-massed behind.
They came, blackthreatening, in exhaustless strength,

As a wild thunder-storm, o'er a high land
Careering, strikes upon a host of pines,
That stately stand, rejoicing in their strength,
Like to black-garbèd giants. There its fire
Striketh down one, and yet one more to earth.
Yet doth it spend its might on them in vain,
So passeth on and leaves them unsubdued.
Thus the West charging fierce with swords of steel,
Beat idly on the iron fence of shields.
Again and yet again the onward charge,
Earth-shaking, thundered upon Arvan's host.
Vain the attempt. The firm ranks held their place ;
The banners stood in strength recoiling not ;
The shields linked fast were as an iron wall,
Showing no gap ; and the sharp swords struck fast,
Unsparring, while the Westmen, spent with toil,
Fainted opprest. Sudden, the whirlwind rush
Of Arvan's scythèd chariots, o'er the plain,
Swept down upon the thinned, unordered line,
Making red way through crowds of mangled men ;
The while the horsemen swarms on either flank
Crashed in upon the foe, even as the fierce
Black whirlwind, in the sultry autumn time,
Swoops down, destroying, on the ripened corn.
Then did wide gaps, in Emeth's walls of men,
Yawn letting in panic and pale defeat.
Dead men by tens of thousands strewed the earth.
Uncounted multitudes struck by the scythes,
Or pierced by sword or javelin, or thrust through
With battle-spears, more slowly through great wounds
Writhed out their souls, seeking the under-world.
The rest drew off reluctant towards the hills.

Thus then the West retreated o'er the plains
Whilst Arvan's chiefs pressed fiercely the pursuit,
With unsheathed swords, endeavouring to slay ;
But foremost Aran, with his battle-mace
Passed, striding with great strides before his men,
Cheering them, shouting shouts, " They fly ! they fly !
Giving their backs unto our smiting steel,
Ye therefore strike them down lest they escape."
Thus Aran spake and smote the flying men
Till all his way was strewed with fallen foes.

But Airus, as he moved over the plain
Beside his son, girt round with warrior men,
Perceived Aran, towering like an oak
Over much brushwood. Also he perceived,
With grief and rage of heart, how, in the strife,
Aran o'erthrew the Western-men in heaps,
Mightily smiting with his battle-mace.
And, being greatly proud of Ethma's strength,
In that his father's heart within his breast,
O'erfond, showed him things other than they were.
He deemed that Ethma drew as dread a sword
As was his own, in champion days gone by ;
When he was known as Airus of the rock,
Having o'erthrown Ozore, the robber chief ;
For in the strife the sword of Airus brake
Being illtempered ; then from out the ground
Airus uprent a rock, and with his might
Hurled at Ozore, and the bright helm of steel
Brake, while Ozore fell dead unto the earth.
Thus then was Airus known throughout the West ;
But Ethma had not won an equal fame ;
For he had lived few years on the green earth,

Nor had attained the fulness of his strength.
Yet Airus, trusting greatly in his son,
Even now saw Aran conquered by his sword,
Being deceived in thought. Thus then he spake,
"Oh ! Ethma see ; for Aran overthrows
Our men in heaps. Now should our own good swords
Redress their wrong ; but the long years from me
Have drained much strength, therefore my battle arm
Hath lost its ancient power. Thou art my son,
Show that thou art all worthy of the name."

And Ethma heard. Then with great, speeding strides
He went over the grass. His ample shield
Clanged on his back ; and in his warrior-hands
He bore the keen-edged, greatly-burnished sword.
Thus drew he nigh to Aran. Then he cried,
"Lift up thine eyes on me. Cease from thy toil.
Lo ! I have come against thee with the sword."
So Aran turned to gaze on him, and stood,
With curious eyes, considering a space.
Then spake he unto him a warning word—
"Yea ! art thou come ? Far better had'st thou fled ;
Then had'st thou spared the life thou now hast lost."

He spake, and sprang at Ethma with his mace,
Meaning to smite him swiftly to the earth ;
But Ethma struck at Aran with the sword,
And cleft the glittering helmet made of steel,
And pierced unto the head, rasing the skin ;
There the sword shattered, even to the hilt.
So Ethma, weaponless, turned him to flee,
Yet won not safety. Aran, with great bounds
O'ertaking, overthrew him. Then he set
His foot upon his breast, and raised his mace,

Intending death. This also had he given
Instant to Ethma, even where he lay ;
But Airus, who had marked his son o'erthrown,
With agèd feet sped hastily o'er the turf,
Crying with voice entreating to his foe,
" Spare him, Oh ! mighty Aran, great in arms.
Is he not but a youth ? No fame it were
If thou shouldst slay him, knowing nought of war ;
But if thou save his life, see ! I will give
Great treasures to thee, not withholding aught—
Steeds, gems of price, whate'er thy soul desires."

But Aran said, " Keep for thyself thy gold,
Since I esteem it not ; but this my foe
I, having overthrown, will straightway slay,
Since a foe's death is pleasant to mine eyes."

Then Airus, answering, cried to him again,
Kneeling afar, lifting a praying voice,
" But if thou need a death, Oh ! warrior-man,
And blood of foes, nor canst be sated else ;
Yet spare thou him, for he is young to die.
Me slaughter in his stead, sparing my son."

Him Aran answered, having his broad foot
Firm planted on the fallen foeman's breast,
" Talker of foolish talk, weak with old age,
If thou desire death, come, and be thou slain ;
But wherefore should I spare this man, my foe,
Who sought my life, because he is thy son ?
Thee know I not : should I his life regard ?
But I regard it not. Behold ! he dies."
He spake, and dashed the soul from out the frame,
As a man, beating on a leafy bush,
Drives out dismayed a timorous-hearted bird.

Then Airus cried a bitter cry of grief—
Of grief and rage—beholding his fair son
Slain by the strong-armed warrior's pitiless mace.
On Aran, all forgetful of his age,
He sprang with gleaming sword, seeking his life.
Him then had Aran slain, even as a man
Crushes with open palm a teasing fly,
That, vexing him, assails his sweatful brow ;
But Airus' soldiers, with quick-watching eyes
Beholding his great peril, sped between,
Bearing brave Aran back for many a pace,
Though fiercely struggling, dealing deathful blows.
But Airus fell lamenting by his son.
Him when his men, returning back, essayed
To raise and comfort, speaking cheerful words,
They found him fled where sounds not human speech
Consoling, nor the tone of friendly voice ;
For in his heart grief held so great a place,
That, Ethma lost, he on his sword had fallen,
And lay in death, heart-hushed, beside his son.

Then did his men fly back, swifter than hinds
That shun the sharp claws of some beast of prey ;
And, with their fear, they drew to swifter flight
The fast retreating warriors of the West ;
While Ervar, chief of horsemen, Irach's son,
Fleet rider on the steed, good with the sword,
Smote with redoubled blows the unshielded rear,
Compelling men unto more speedy flight.

And Arvan spake to Irach, " They fight well,
My warriors, well and bravely. 'Tis a joy
To see their swords beat down the Western men.
Now shall we conquer triumph, spite of fate."

Him Irach answered, " Verily, mighty king,
Their swords are sharp, and the men wield them well.
Nor do I fear the issue on the plains ;
But the high hills, o'ergrown with shaggy pines,
Are as a fortress strong to face assault :
Yea, many men must die ere they be won."
And Arvan, answering, spake to him again,
" Chieftain, advance thy hosts towards the hills,
For we must dare the event. If the high gods
Grant to us victory, well then for us :
If not, like brave men let us face our fate."

So Irach and his men moved o'er the plain
Pursuing ; and the West more disarrayed,
Perceiving them advance, on every side
Gave way, desiring shelter from the foe,
Thus eddied the red strife over the plain,
And the North onward drew, heartened by hope.

Then Arvan's heart saw pleasant victory
Flowering for him, red from the thorny sheath
Of earlier anguish. Yet still prompt in war,
Seeing that Irach's men advanced their lines,
Flushed by success, disordered with much haste,
He, fearing still surprise from wary foes,
Sent unto Irach, showing him his thought,
" Refrain thy sharpened sword from swift pursuit,
Else were the victory rendered yet unsure."
Thus sent he to the chieftain warning words,
Mindful of evil, having seen much war.
But by ill-chance, amid the battle din
The messenger caught the great monarch's words
With ill-informed ears ; so took the charge
Mis-worded unto Irach, where he stood,

Withholding from pursuit his eager men,
Checking confusion in their speeding lines.
"Thus spake the king," he said, "Refrain thou not
Thy sharpened sword, great chief, from swift pursuit,
Else were our victory rendered yet unsure."
This having heard, although his heart misgave,
Irach obeyèd straightway, for he deemed
Arvan had surer tidings of the strife,
And of the general aspect of the fight
Than he, enveloped in its dusty whirl,
So loosed the rein, and prest the spur of speed
Into the soldiers' hearts, urging them on.
Thus, in hot haste, reached they the wooded hills,
Disordered by the fierceness of their charge,
Part mingled with the foe's swift flying rear.
Then as they deemed the victory assured,
For that they trod their foemen down with ease,
Even as a river-horse upon the bank
Of some great stream treads down the rushy crowd
With his broad feet, high raised they the shout,
Welcoming victory with clamorous cries.

But there were men close ambushed on the hills
Who watched occasion, having ready swords.
So when King Arvan's men, flushed with pursuit,
All disarrayed, attained the forest marge,
Sudden the tempest on their gallèd heads
Broke warningless, encompassing them round
In a great net of strife. Swift o'er the host
Came a great fear ; for every warrior's heart
Sank, being dismayed, fearing new treachery.
Sudden arose, throughout the thronged array,
A cry of "Treason !" Then grew very pale

Even brave faces, battle-bronzed, whom fear
Of foemen's sword had ne'er availed to spoil
Of ruddy colour. For an instant paused
The smiting swords wielded by warrior hands.
Unvaliant men looked with appalled eyes
Averted from the carnage ; unblest flight
Would soon have swept the host, all order lost,
Routed, despairing to the river-wave ;
But Irach stood unflinching, in the front
Of the great strife, upon his broad-orbed shield,
Bearing the onset of the West ; his sword
Gigantic toiling through the surging crowds,
Where the dead men fell frequent ; while his voice
Rose, like a trumpet-call, above the strife,
Stabbling fainting hearts. So for a space
The conflict dubious, swaying to and fro,
Advanced not to its issue. Then a change
Flashed, lightning swift, once more over the field.
King Arvan and his guard, with headlong charge,
Fell on the foe, cleaving the shrinking host,
Even in an instant, as a thunderbolt
Smites through an unresisting flock of sheep.

For when the king perceived his word was vain,
And that his warmen more impetuously
Urged their advance up to the wooded hills ;
He, coming instant on the wings of speed,
With his own single sword half changed the day.
The foe reeled backward wheresoe'er he came,
Seeing their hearts feared his god-given strength ;
For as he charged through the thick serried files,
To right and left of him the dead men fell,
Even as the close-set stalks of bearded wheat

Fall when the wild boar tramples through the corn.
And even whilst he smote them in his rage,
Making their fiercest quail, swart Nardon came
At Arvan's bidding, swift as a sea-wind,
Seeing the message word sent to his ear,
"Haste thou to Arvan's succour, tarrying not,"
Had come unto him, urging fleet advance.
Him followed all the wild, death-serving tribes
With sudden charge, bruising the foeman's host,
Defeating their intent, changing success
Once more into confused battle strife.

There Emeth, knowing that the hour was come
When he must strike for triumph, onward drawn
By the fierce heat of battle, which doth fire
Even hearts of unbrave men to dare great deeds,
Pressed forward through the conflict's eddying tides,
Where a great gap within the shaken host
Was by the fugitives left, who feared the sword
Of Arvan the all-slaying ; and the kings,
Though sundered still by a wild world of men,
Saw each the other. Then at Emeth's side,
Lygrul, who rode throughout the battle day,
Pointing to Arvan's plumèd crest, spake words,
"Lo ! thy great foe, oh, king ! he draweth nigh.
Unsheath thou then the demon sword ; its light
Will with great strength strike on his palsied heart,
Robbing his arm of might. And Emeth drew,
Whilst even as he drew, the sun, long hours
Struggling to rend the prison walls of cloud,
Broke forth and looked on the king's golden shield,
And on his golden helmet, set with gems,
And on his golden plated breadth of breast,

Till all his body blazed bright as a sun.
Thence was it haply that King Arvan's men
O'erterrified, looking, did fear the sword ;
For the great blade, undrawn from its true sheath,
Shone not as in old days, but faint and dull
Flung back upon men's eyes the sunny beam.
Dim though it shone, matched with its ancient light,
The yellow glow availed to fill men's hearts
With anxious terror. Panic-struck they stood
An instant. Then a cry of horror rose,
"The sword ! The foe doth fight us with the sword !"
As sheep shrink back with sudden scared rush,
When the dog turns on them, so Arvan's men
Fell backward for an instant, and he stood
With a few chosen chiefs to Emeth's host
Opposed alone. Yet not for one heart-pulse
Did his soul shrink, nor did he dream of flight ;
But, knowing his last hour was come, he flung
His targe aside, and spurred his fiery steed ;
Then, with both hands whirling his battle sword,
Rushed at the Western king to smite him down.

There did King Emeth's warriors like a hedge
Fence in their lord ; nor went a foot-breadth back,
One foot, among the band of steadfast men,
Who with strong, valorous breasts stood fronting death ;
Though Arvan with the awful strength that comes
When brave men have relinquished hope and seek
Only untarnished deaths, hewed a wide way
Through hostile bone and sinew, till his path
Through the thick fight was strewn with the dead men,
As is the north wind's path through autumn woods
With yellow leaves. Him all his valiant chiefs

Sprang hastily forward, seeking straight the war,
Girt by his men ; for upon every man
That saw King Arvan, came hot shame and grief
That he should spare his life, when Arvan's own
Was staked unflinchingly. In every soul
Was the great strength which makes a man more strong
Than tenfold odds, or magic spell, or fate—
It being mightiest of all things that are
In all this lower world, which speaking men,
Sorrow-beset, possess. With a fierce rush,
As of a sea-wave, back into the fray
Came the fierce Northmen ; each man's heart afire.
All faces dark, all arms strung with resolve
To save their monarch's life, or, foiled, to die.

Too late they came. Long ere their warrior swords
Had reached the circle, where amid the rage
Of the increasing strife King Arvan's helm
Showed over all, swaying with every blow
That the strong sword dealt out on casques of men,
The evil had been wrought. Around the chiefs
The thronging Western men had closed their ranks,
As a snake's coils close round a struggling prey ;
Till the swords, wielded now in wearying hands,
Kept not sufficient space to strike the foe.
Then Urar fell, conqueror of many men,
For Nar's great iron mace upon his helm
Descending, beat through all the brazen guards
And crushed the skull. Straight, darkness as of death
Involved the inner caverns of the head ;
But the brave soul, descending, sought the shades.
Next, Ar's right arm, sore smitten by the sword,
Dropped his death-dealing axe ; and Nardon fell

On a great heap of dead ; and Ervar's hand,
Sore smitten, lost its hold on the bright sword.
Then Mahath struck him fiercely ; and he fell,
Sense-reft, upon the slain. Arvan alone,
Followed of Irach, o'er the prostrate ranks
Of slaughtered men still drove his foaming steed—
Its once fair skin sullied with battle-dust,
And reddened with the blood of foes o'erthrown—
To reach King Emeth. At the last, his toil
Was crowned with triumph : in the whirl of war
An eddy swept aside the meaner men
For one brief instant ; and the Western king
Looked upon Arvan's face. No armed men
Sundered the foemen, shielding Emeth's life.

Then in his stirrups the great Northern king
Upstood, and lifted high his warrior sword,
Meaning to close the battle by one blow.
This had he done ; but Lygrul marked swift death
Approaching Emeth ; and his iron dart
Flung, piercing Arvan's steed through the broad breast.
Up rose the steed in air, pawing the wind
In agony, then fell at Emeth's feet.
But Arvan, yet unvanquished, on the ground
Stood with firm planted feet, prepared to strive,
And sell life forfeit dearly. Then to him
The Western king spake loudly, warning words :
“ Yield thee, King Arvan ! for thine hour is come
To yield or die : the gods have wrought thy doom.
Lo ! in my hand I bear the charmed sword ! ”

But Arvan answered with an angry roar,
That sounded like a lion's, when at bay
He glares upon the hunters with large eyes

Of wild defiance, and prepares to spring :
“ Hadst thou ten demon swords, I would not yield !
Guard thee, for I will slay thee where thou art.”

Quick crouched he to spring upon the king ;
Even as a pard assembles all its strength
To spring at some sleek tenant of the mead—
Some ox, that, pastured by the river side,
Is fed full fat, fit for the feast of kings ;
And being stronger far, and far more skilled
In sword play, he had stricken him to earth.
But ere he sprang, a mace, descending swift,
Urged on by some unknown and unseen hand,
Smote his bright helm, and stretched him on the ground
Bereft of light, unmoving as the dead.

Then Irach, who, soon as King Arvan fell,
Had from his steed downsprung, stretched forth his
shield,
Sheltering him from the assault of foes,
For many sought to seize him where he lay ;
But Irach hindered them, whilst he o’erthrew
Men of renown, famed for their warrior strength,
Till Irach smote them and they dropped their shield ;
And some he wounded sorely, and some slew.

First Mahath met him in the battle whirl ;
And leaping on a high-heaped mound of slain,
That lay at Irach’s feet, he struck at him
With all his strength, wielding in both his hands
His battle-axe, broad-bladed, feared of men.
He struck, the blow clashed on the ample shield
That Irach raised, warding the fateful stroke.
Then with the effort Mahath, overswayed,
Fell from the heap of dead whereon he stood,

And Irach smote him falling. But the chief,
Being unsheltered, on his shoulder-blade
Suffered the blow, that through the warrior chest
Forced onward to the life its unchecked way.
So Mahath fell dead on a heap of slain.

This seeing, sudden rage fired Ira's heart,
For he and Mahath through the days of youth
Had dwelt together, eating at one board ;
And Ira loved him even as his life.
Thus, without words, clenching his bearded jaws
With rage unspoken, over Mahath's corpse
He sprang upon his slayer. Not more fierce
Swoops down an eagle on a peasant boy
That bears her young from her despoiled nest.
Still, Irach stood, watching the coming shock
With steadfast eyes, whose eyelids never winked.
Then flashing fell Ira's tremendous sword,
Grinding along the length of Irach's blade,
Even as the levin flame adown a tree,
Smooth-barked, much glistening, glides into the earth.
But on the broad hilt Irach stayed the blow ;
Then, rising to his height, he smote in turn
At Ira, with his strength. On the bright helm
Of polished brass came down the clashing blade,
Through the twined horse-hair crest, white-glistening, fair,
It clove a path ; and through the yellow plate
Of burnished metal, lightly as a knife
Cleaves through the golden rind of some round fruit,
The great sword past. Then Ira, by the blow
Cloven to the eyes, fell dead beside his friend.

But Irach, even while Ira falling died,
Perceiving Azel, how he privily near

Aimed the long lance at him, meaning to slay,
Came with a great leap, leaping at his foe.
Then Azel the black-bearded, filled with fear,
Soon as he saw the near gleam of the sword,
Knowing 'twas Irach's, flung his hasty lance,
And crouched behind his shield : but the lance gleamed
Swift through the air, and pierced the breast-plate through,
Grazing the flesh. There from the head the shaft
Brake suddenly, down falling to the earth.
And Irach, angered, with a hasty foot
Struck Azel's shield, and beat him to the ground,
Him overthrowing ; and at Zur the chief,
Who pressed upon him with a mace of might,
Willing to succour Azel in his need,
He aimed a blow, cleaving the iron mace.
Then once again wheeling his surging blade,
He struck the chieftain on his well-fenced neck,
Slaying him straightway. Yet again he struck
At Azel rising, and essaying flight ;
He struck and slew him. There cried Lygrul's voice,
For that he watched the conflict from anear,
Being all unwilling to adventure him
In single strife with Irach, great in arms,
Well knowing all the might of Irach's sword.
Therefore he cried, " Wherefore contend ye thus
Singly against your foe—combine your strength,
So shall ye drive him headlong from the field."
This, Ruach, hearing, captain of the guard,
He with his band on Irach flung them straight,
Endeavouring his capture. But the chief
Smote Ruach sorely wounded to the earth,
And Gareb overthrew and Azmaveth,

And beat down Zamoth, cleaving through his helm.
With that the Northmen reached the place and saw
King Arvan's corse, for such indeed it seemed,
Stretched like a fallen pine upon the ground,
And Irach overstriding it, with shield
And restless sword, defending it from wrong.
He marked the tardy rescue come at last,
And knowing that the battle now was lost,
And that retreat was all that warrior strength
Might still essay to win, summoned his men
To yet one effort more. With a great cry
Calling upon the children of his tribe,
"Northmen ! take up the body of your king.
Let not the foe trample on Arvan's face ;
High hold the sacred banner o'er his head.
Dead or alive, he shall subdue the foe.
Charge for the Northland, warriors of the North !"

Then ten men, of their strongest, lifted up,
High on their brawny shoulders, the vast shape
Of Arvan, and they placed within its sheath
His warrior sword ; the while their comrades strove
To break the circle of opposing foes.
And at the first their strivings were in vain :
But afterwards Irach's keen watching eyes
Perceived a wavering in the hostile ranks,
And deemed the time come for the final charge.
Then catching quickly up a banner pole
From where it rested on a heap of slain,
Clenched in the dead hand of a banner-man
Slain in its guard, he raised a thunder shout,
"Lo ! how they hem us in. Sons of the North,
What ! shall they take you captive ? Charge again,

Show ye the Western wolves your swords are keen.
Have we then journeyed, conquering, through the world
Thus to be trapped by the foe's craft at last ?
Charge, for ye strike for life and liberty."

So, with all strength, charged they again the foe
Fiercely, as those who know that all their hope
Is in the effort: even dying hands
Wielded the steel, and struck their life breath out
In a last blow. And the grim circle broke
In which they prisoned stood. The Western host,
Scared by the strength portentous of the North,
Broke scattered, flying diverse ; as the grains
Of dust in autumn fly across the fields,
Driven in a dense cloud o'er the level lands.

Thus Irach and his men from off the field,
Bearing the sensereft body of the king,
Slowly withdrew, still smiting as they went ;
Hewing a red path through th' opposing ranks
With their broad-bladed swords ; while from the hills
The Western warriors, speeding, hemmed them in,
Closing again upon the flanks and rear,
And menacing their van ; the turbulent waves
Of battle surging 'gainst their iron line,
As on a black flanked ship, that rends the deep,
The ocean billows spend their strength in vain.
So journeyèd they slowly from the hills
Seeking the reedy margin of the stream,
Also the bridges broad which o'er the wave
Proffered escape, giving desired way
Into the thicket-fencèd river isles.

But when the Western men perceived the foe
Slowly, but surely, fashioning retreat,

And winning safety, they with rage increased
Urged their assault. The javelin men their darts
Hurled ceaseless on the Northmen's galled flanks.
The arrow-darters shot their sleet of shafts,
Fast as a snow-cloud, in the winter time,
Showers forth its stored flakes. Anon the charge
Of armoured horse essayed to break their ranks
Dashing upon them, as a mountain wave
On a landseeking vessel's broken stern.
The axe-blows fell upon the much bruised shields,
Biting through steel and wood. The dead men dropt
Fast in the ranks. While wounded men, sore struck,
Dragged for a brief space their quick bleeding limbs,
Then fell down fainting, praying, with stretched hands,
Unto their comrades for sweet aid in vain.
Still onward strove the column, its way strewn
With corpses. Thus they gained with dusk the plain
Where stood the chariots ranged, the slinger bands,
And many horsemen ordered by their chiefs,
Who knew the strife had gone against the North,
And prudent sought to shelter the retreat,
Somewhat yet saving from the general wreck.

Then sank a stillness o'er the battlefield.
Fearing surprise, the foe drew back his host ;
And the worn Northmen from the death-soiled plains
Slowly withdrew their carnage-shattered files.
All through the hours of gloom, over the stream,
By many bridges, fashioned with much care,
At Irach's word, by hands of prudent toil,
Hurried the multitude of outworn men,
With hearts dejected, seeking swift escape
From the stern victors' red, destroying sword.

So vast the wreck of the world-gathered host,
The morning sun rose on the eager crowd
Yet spread along the river-margined shore,
Seeking the island refuge with fierce speed.
Them Emeth's warriors marked by the clear light,
Returning, of the day. The horsemen swept
Down to the slaughter, with unsheathed swords,
In swarms uncounted as the vulture clouds
That from the heavens descend to tear a corpse.

There Irach, fearing that the foe might win
Over the bridge the passage to the isle,
Involving thus the host in general wreck,
Bade the king's guard to burn each bridge with fire.
This did they forthwith ; and at first the smoke
Dark curling rose, like that which from the crest
Of a fire-mountain rises on the air,
Darkening the sky. But after, as the flames
Eruptive shake their crimson crests on high,
Menacing death ; so up into the heavens
Shot the red fires. Then on the bank a shriek
Of anguish rose from the deserted crowd ;
And from the blazing bridge fire-scorched men
Flung themselves, loathing life, into the stream.
While of the crowd upon the river bank
Thousands, avoiding the remorseless sword
Of the grim foe, sought death in the cold wave ;
For the blood-loving warriors of the West
Spared amid the crowd no soul that breathed,
But smote them all with their well-sharpened steel.

So when the Northmen, gnashing their white teeth
With shame and anguish, from the isle withdrew
Unto the yellow river's further shore,

They left behind them on the reddened plain
Only the Western horsemen and their swords,
And heaped multitudes of smitten men.
But o'er the river sank a veil of smoke,
Through which the Northern eyes in vain essayed,
Piercing, to see the sorrows on the shore.
For through the gloom rang screams of mortal pain,
Vain supplications, unavailing cries
From wounded men, and curses which despair
Hurled at the gods, who, sitting throned on high,
With an unfading smile upon their brows,
Considered earth, not heeding earthly grief.

CANTO XIV.

ERVAR, Prince Irach's son, lay on the plain.
Alone he lay, sore wounded in the strife ;
The Northern men had left him in their flight,
Deeming him stricken even unto death.
Thus reft of sense, he, amid mounds of slain,
And maimèd, greatly-groaning mortals, lay.
To him came near the spoilers, stripping men
Of their fair armour, burying the dead,
Slaying the wounded—such was Emeth's will.
Only the chiefs and men of might they spared,
Reserving them for prison and the chain,
Lest Emeth haply, in the after war,
Might, needing hostages, seek all in vain.
Therefore, what time they chanced where Ervar lay,
And marked his armour, glittering fair even yet
Spite of its battle-soils ; also the robe
Of purple blent with golden grain, that clothed
His young limbs, as the sunset cloud of even
Veileth the purple-gleaming sunset sky ;
They knew him princely, and they stayed their hands,
Smiting him not, nor taking off his head ;
But placed him on a litter, and with care
Conveyed him to the camp. There for a while
They tended him. The healers came and bound

His wounds with friendly balsams, good to close
The gaping depths of the red-lippèd wounds.
So lay he, reft of sense for many days ;
For that the harm was great, and unsure life
Wavered with failing feet upon the edge
Of that black-chasmed world of nothingness,
Which mortal men recoil from, fearing death.

Afterwards, Emeth having gone his way
O'er the great yellow river of the West,
Pursuing Arvan and his flying host
Into the vast of the uncultured lands,
The guard who kept the camp, and the great crowd
Of ministering slaves, left ere the march—
Such was King Emeth's clear expressed word,
For that their numbers hindered swift advance—
Broke up from their abiding-place, and passed,
Returning on their way, each to his place.
But the camp guard—old men unfit for war—
Spared therefore from long marches through waste lands,
Came to the royal city of the West,
Where was King Emeth's stately palace home ;
Also the wounded bare they on soft beds,
Litters o'erstrewn with various hides of beasts.
Ervar the prince, scarce conscious of his fate,
They also bore, sore smitten of the sword,
More sorely by the grief of the defeat
Which had discrowned the Northland of her fame.
Therefore upon his litter, hour by hour,
Revolving heavy thoughts, he wearily lay,
Speaking to no man, wrapt in gloomy grief,
That made a black night of the sunbright hours.
Thus came he to the city of the West,

Borne 'mid the captive train, a spoil of war,
To glut the people's greedy gazing eyes,
That gaze aye gladly upon foes o'erthrown,
On captured wealth, and prisoners' chainèd hands.
Therefore, when, having come to Emeth's town,
They passed in long procession through its streets,
The throngèd mass, on either side the way,
Stood like a wall, margining their advance ;
Whilst every window, bright with watching eyes,
Twinkled like star-filled heavens at eventide.
No soul was absent on that day of joy
From the dense crowds that lined the length of way ;
No Western man or woman, youth or child,
Who dwelt within the city's populous homes,
Only the dying were unpresent there.
Mawrawh the princess also, with the rest,
Stood at a curtained window, veiled from view,
Watching the long procession slowly pass.

Now Mawrawh was King Emeth's well-loved child ;
Fair was she as a gracious wayside flower,
That stayeth pilgrim feet of weary men
By its exceeding beauty ; shy of heart
As is a bird new captured ; her large eyes
Brown as a peat-stained brook, liquid and clear,
Took all hearts by their light of loveliness ;
And her dear cheek, rosed by the passionate strength
Of roused heart-feelings, vanquished the fresh glow,
Dawn-bright, that dwells on rose-lipped ocean-shells.
Such was young Mawrawh, dowered with the gifts
Of sixteen summers of content. There lived,
Through all King Emeth's ocean-girdled realms,
No flower of womanhood more fair than she.

So stood she at the window on that day,
With a great joy close nested in her heart,
Watching the spoils of strife pass by below ;
For had not Emeth's sword prevailed in war
Above King Arvan, spoiler of the world ?
Therefore would she, his daughter, have delight
In all that evidenced her sire's renown.

They passed, the standards torn, and soiled with gore ;
Steeds, whose brave masters had been slain ; strong cars,
Scythe-set, wherein great chieftains through the strife
Had raged amid the falling ranks of men.
Also, men brought along in loaded wains
Large sheaves of battle-spears, and strife-notched swords,
Helmets, and garments gathered from the slain ;
And as all these in ordered line went by,
The populace, rejoicing still in wreck,
Glad also at its freedom from all fear,
Cheered with the strength of its ten myriad throats.
Afterwards came the wounded, a long train
Of weary-visaged men, all gashed and torn,
Like ships that, struggling landward, after strife
With the gaunt might of the grim hurricane,
Too maimed for further conflict with the winds,
Seek refuge even in some foeman's port.
On them gazed Mawrawh, somewhat moved in heart,
Though they were foemen, hated of her land,
For that her heart was tender, being young.

Late in the sorrowful train, Ervar the prince
Came on a litter, borne on arms of slaves.
No heed he gave to all the shouting crowd,
Partly through languor of his unhealed wounds,
Partly through the sick sorrow of his heart,

That mourned in anguish for his country's fall.
His white face, pillowed on a panther skin,
Showed sad, set round with folds of yellow hair.
On him looked Mawrawh also, with a gaze,
At first unoccupied of anxious thoughts ;
But even as she stood, and looked on him,
And saw him, where he lay there motionless,
Mute, with closed eyelids opening not at all,
His face white with the paleness born of wounds—
Drainers of purple life-blood from the frame—
A change came o'er her ; her young, pitiful heart
Swelled with great grief for his afflicted state—
Grief, and a tenderness too deep for words ;
For the dread god looked love into her breast,
Kindling with fiery eyes the fire within.

So, though he passèd instant from her gaze,
Thenceforward in her soul was deep unrest,
Nor might she occupy her daylight hours
With household tasks, or pleasures as of old ;
Also the dewy night, giver of rest,
Shed not upon her eyelids sleep divine,
Most pleasant gift to sorrow-wearied men.
But a continual anguish ate away
Peace from her soul ; and from her rounded cheek
The smooth, soft loveliness of youth took flight ;
Also her strength went from her, and she sat,
When food was placed before her, with closed lips,
Desiring nothing, for her heart was sad.
So drooped she 'neath the parching light of love ;
Even as a white, fair flower droops to earth,
Parched with excess of sunshine, so she pined.

Then spake her nurse to her, an ancient slave,

Who loved her, even from her infant days,
She being grieved, seeing her suffering,
Nor knowing the true cause ; thus then she said,
“ Wilt thou not tell me, even me, thy nurse,
Wherefore thy heart is sad ? Thy cheek is pale,
And the soft roundness passes from thy limbs.
Thou dost not eat food as in former days,
But nourishest thy thoughts with many sighs.
This, oh ! beloved one, is grief of heart ;
Therefore reveal it to me, fearing not.”

And she—“ I nothing ail. The grief will pass,
Being a fever haply in the blood,
Offspring of summer suns.” Then said her nurse,
“ Thou sighest not for sickness, Mawrawh sweet,
For suddenly the ill-chance came to thee ;
Nor canst thou blind these eyes, that love thee well,
They having known thee from thine earliest days,
Prompt are they to discern thy griefs and joys.
Show therefore unto me, I pray, the cause.”

But she replied again, “ ’Tis as I said,
Only a sickness, and will shortly pass ;
Nor doth it well beseem thee to enquire
For hidden source of grief, I shunning speech.”

Yet when her nurse had urged her many days,
At last, she, borne down by her secret pain,
Showed to her all the nature of her grief.
Thus then she said, “ Grey nurse, if thou wilt know
The trouble of my heart, and why I pine
With white-faced grief even in this palace home,
Where mine seems all that mortal hearts desire.
See, I will show it to thee, hiding nought ;
And yet I shame me that I have to show,

Though knowing thee, that thou dost hold me dear.
Yet if I speak, swear thou with steadfastness
That thou wilt hide the word within thy heart,
Showing no mortal of my secret grief."

Her answered straight her nurse, "Oh ! best beloved,
Mawrawh, sweet princess, utter forth thy thought,
For that my life is but the shade of thine,
Failing apart from thee ; nor canst thou crave
In vain aught that my power avails to give,
Even though my heart's blood paid the purchase price
Of that thou did'st desire." Then Mawrawh spake,
With broken utterance, hesitating words,
"See, when I gazed down from the window's height,
Upon the triumph-pomp that wound below,
There did I mark—I shame me for my speech—
Why died I not ere to my father's child
Came such disgrace ! I saw him where he lay,
With white face, on the litter, struck to death.
I saw, I pitied him ! Thou standest mute !
Heard'st thou not what I told ? I pitied him,
My father's foe ! Ah ! whither shall I flee
From my heart's fever ? Oh ! immortal god,
What harmful, impious act, in the past years,
Have I unhappy done, that thou should'st fill
My soul with pity for a hateful foe ?
Why speakest thou not, nurse ? Thou scornest me !
Hateful one, wherefore did'st thou wring forth words
From my dumb tongue, which else had hidden deep
My fallen estate from uncompassionate thought."

Thereto replied her nurse with trembling voice—
For that her nurseling's vehement grief of heart
Shook her, that she might not command her speech,—

“ Oh ! calm thee, sweet. 'Tis but an evil chance
Hath come to thee. Such things in changeful youth
Happen to all, to maidens and young men,
For that the Love-god, with his fiery eyes,
Kindleth strange feelings in the o'ermastered heart,
Neither may youth nor innocence avail
To keep from out the life the harmful fire.”

And Mawrawh answered : “ If this thing be so,
As thou hast said, and mine a common chance,
Such as befalleth maidens when the god
Useth his power, compelling the weak heart,
What aid is yet for me, pitying my foe,
Who knoweth not of hapless Mawrawh's grief ? ”

“ Yet comfort thee,” replied the slave, “ for life
Bringeth strange things to pass, and from the root
Men cannot well divine the future flower,
For from the unsightly, rough, earth-soiled root
Ariseth oft a blossom passing fair,
Even as from a shapelier root, mayhap,
A poison bloom ariseth in its hour.”

“ What then wilt thou devise ? ” said the princess,
“ Wherefrom may grow peace to my weary heart.
Speak, ancient one. For my soul will not rest,
But clamours, famished, for a peaceful word.”

Then answered her her nurse : “ I may not speak
Rash words impetuous ; for this thing is hard,
And needeth prudent counsel. Should I speak
A word, even straightway, answering thy desire,
See, it might lead my nursling's feet aside
Into forbidden paths, wherein lurks death.
Suffer me then to commune with my heart,
Secretly striving toward some clearfaced hope,

That haply is unfar, though hidden now
From our grief-darkened eyes. Even as from one,
Who journeyeth through the woodland ways by night,
The face of him who might declare the path
Is yet concealed, though he may dwell full near.
Anon the moon ariseth ; then is found
The counsellor, who showeth to him his road.
So fareth he along, content of heart.
To us such chance may also come, the god
Teaching us plainly things not now revealed.
So light upon our darkness may arise."

Then Mawrawh said : "Thou dallyest with me.
The fever of my grief thou dost despise,
Seeking delays unblest, I claiming speech."

And the nurse answered : "Sweet, content thy heart ;
Know, 'twere thy loss if I should answer now."

"But when wilt thou give answer, ancient nurse,
If I permit thee wordless to retire ?"

"To-morrow," said the slave, "will I reply ;
Then shalt thou hear what the wise gods reveal."

"So be it," answered Mawrawh ; "though my heart
Chafes at delay, I will accord thee grace ;
For I believe thou lovest me, thy child."

"Yea, princess, well I love thee," said the slave ;
"Have borne thee in my arms. Thy mother sucked
The lifeful milk from my now faded breast.
She now is dust ; but thou remainest yet,
Sweet one, a joy unto my aged eyes,
Fair as a star when night is gathering round.
Fear not ! for I will serve thee to the death."
There ceased they from their communing, and went
Each on her way, refraining from more words.

But on the morrow, Mawrawh the princess
Spake to her slave, the ancient grey-haired nurse,
And said, "The hour for silent thought hath passed.
Show forth thy counsel to me, tarrying not."

Then said her nurse, "Yea! I will speak my thought,
Declaring all that the wise gods have shown.
But first, oh! Mawrawh, say, speaking true words,
Canst thou not quench the secret hidden fire,
That preys within the flesh walls of thy heart?
This doing, know, thou shalt again have peace."

But she—"Cease from such counselling. 'Tis vain.
How can I smother then the eating fire?
The sleep has past from my night-circled life,
For thinking of his beauty, and his grief.
Through the all-empty days, my hungry heart
Desires his presence, clamouring famishedly.
Vain is thy counsel, therefore, grey-haired slave.
Even if I would forget, yet may I not."

"If this be so, and thou canst not subdue
The love-thought that doth rage within thy breast,
Then must thou seek the face of this thy foe,
Thy foe whom thou dost love with all desire,
And commune with him often, day by day;
Till in his heart is kindled answering flame.
For sometimes doth the Love-god, at his will,
Touch even stubborn hearts of warrior men.
Bending them, as a girl's heart, to his will.
Yet this, though great his might, he may not do,
Save for occasion that doth set the face
Of her who shall be loved before his eyes.
Since unknown beauty is as unseen goms,
Desired not of covetous regard."

“But thinkest thou, I seeking with him speech,
He will refuse obedience to my will?
It were a new grief unto Mawrawh’s heart,
Should he receive her message-word with scorn.”
“Fear not,” replied her slave, “for such event
He cannot turn aside, nor choose but hear.
He is a captive, thou the conqueror’s child;
Gladly will he win favour at thy hand,
Seeing it greatly may advantage him
To have a friend, true in his hour of need.”
“But how then shall I come before his face,
Nor sink for shame, since fitting cause is not
Wherethrough I might approach his presence fair,
Constrained by its strength unto near speech,
Even though himself were judge?” Then said the slave,
“Tarry, and I will show thee words to say.
Say, ‘Thou hast heard the legend of the sword;
And, fearing greatly for thy father’s life,
Thyself would’st know, from lips sincere, the truth;
Lest haply, unused to the magic blade,
It might oppress him in the dangerous strife.’”

Then Mawrawh—“Seek occasion, grey-haired nurse,
To bring me to the prince, since this must be.”

So the nurse sought occasion, and she brought
Her nursling on a day before the prince,
Where he was walking by the prison-house,
In a small open mead, girt round with trees,
Watched of the warder, lest he should escape.
But when the warder saw King’s Emeth’s child
Slowly approaching him, he, being warned,
And having had fore-knowledge of her will,
Withdrew him, going speedily his way;

Knowing that she would commune with the prince
Touching the war, and deeds done of her sire ;
Also of Arvan's kingdom, and the sword.

But Mawrawh, when she saw Prince Ervar near,
Shrank fearful from his presence. All her face
And her fair shoulders, and well-moulded breast,
Burned with red light of shame. For great her grief,
Now that her feet stood whence was no return,
That she, o'erstepping bounds of maidenhood,
Should commune with a stranger man, her foe ;
And half she turned to fly. Then a swift thought,
Sent of the Love-god, came with sudden flight,
Sped with an arrowy fleetness through the air,
And quivered in the soft depths of her breast ;
For that his will was she should love the prince,
Her father's foe, seeing by such strange love
He chiefly proves his power o'er mortal hearts.
"I may not fly," she thought : "will he not scorn,
If, having summoned him to see my face,
My heart shrinks back before him ?" So she turned,
Looking upon him with compassionate eyes,
For that he showed yet pale from recent wounds,
And weaker than beseemed his warrior height.
Then added she a word, speaking her mind,
Saying, "Prince Ervar, I, King Emeth's child,
Have sent for thee, desiring in my soul
To know what truths men, babbling many words,
Speak of the charmed sword, King Arvan's glaive,
Which, being reft from him by Lygrul's craft,
Hath come, so willed the gods, to my sire's hands,
Gift of the sky-lords, who achieve strange things.
Dear is her father's life to Mawrawh's soul ;

And a great dread is on it lest the glaive,
Losing its nature in unwonted hands,
May fail my father in the hour of strife.
Therefore say on. Deem'st thou the magic blade
Hath yet victorious might in Emeth's hand,
As in the days of old, when Arvan slew,
Destroying men with the bright blade of gold ?
Or speak men falsely, saying that the gods
Grant triumph to its wielder in the strife ?”

And Ervar, looking on her, saw her face,
More beautiful than is a sunrise cloud
Filled with the rosy glory of the sun ;
And he desired her, bowing down his soul,
Welcoming to it the dread Love-god's fire.
Then did he gladly speak at her request,
Showing the story of the charmed sword,
And of the kings it had o'erthrown in fight ;
Of Lygrul's treachery also, and the wound
Which the deep-stricken Northland won thereby.
And ever as he paused, she questioned him,
Seeking fresh knowledge ; till their communing,
Protracted many moments, found an end.

Then said the Prince, “ Know that I could reveal
Yet other marvels linked with Arvan's sword ;
But the time faileth. Haply future hours
Will, envious of my gladness, bring no more
Delight of communing with thee again.”

And she—“ If thou hast other thought to show,
Prince Ervar, we will meet at this same spot,
When fit occasion is for further speech.
Fain would I know the truth-word of the sword,
Even to the uttermost, since all the war

Eddies around the splendour of its light ;
And in the whirl of strife lives Mawrawh's sire."

Therefore it was so, as she said. Again,
And oft again, they met and spake alone ;
For Ervar lengthened out the warrior tale,
Desirous of her presence. And she came,
Loving him each day with a greater love,
But never could she frame in fitting words
The sorrow of her heart. Even when she sought
For utterance, attempting in her pain
Remedy for her grief, speech-thwarting shame
Laid his broad, unseen hands upon her lips,
So that they, quivering greatly, held their peace ;
Nor through them passed one word, revealing thought
That gnawed her anxious, love-tormented heart.

Then did her sad eyes try to tell the tale
Her tongue might never utter. But the prince,
Heart-occupied, perchance with pain of soul,
Or saw not what they said, or heeded not ;
Bucklered by sorrow for his land's defeat
From the soft perils of the Love-god's snares.
So deemed she, knowing not Prince Ervar's heart ;
For he, unwitting in his inmost soul
Of her heart-tenderness, yet felt for her
A passionate fire, consuming as her own ;
For him, too, had the Love-god moved to love.

Yet would he, though tormented by the Power,
Strive with his strength divine, 'gainst which no man,
No mortal wearing flesh, wrestling prevails.
For thus he said : " I will not love my foe :
She is the daughter of an alien race,
King Emeth's child ;—his child, who hath o'erthrown

Our warriors, filling all the North with shame,
Shame, and confusion of unblest defeat.
Should I then blend our blood with his, through whom
Our blood is spilt like water on the earth ?
Nay, if she prayed me on bended knees,
Entreating my compassionate regard,
Love-thought and nuptial-bond, yet would I turn
From her allurements, armed in mute hate,
Hate for her race, more strong than love for her ! ”

Thus spake Prince Ervar, knowing not his heart,
Weak overmuch, nor yet the Love-god's power.
Meanwhile he held his peace ; and Mawrawh's soul
Mourned at his silence, knowing not the cause.
And first she in her heart took secret thought,
Debating greatly how she might prevail,
Turning to her the current of his life.
And her mind laboured toward accomplishment
Of this her hope ; even as a labouring hind,
With horny hands, long used to great toil,
Digs with much patience, seeking to deflect
Some rivulet's flow from its accustomed bed,
Towards his field, planted with household herbs ;
Which often, in the sultry summer tide,
Barren through lack of moisture, grieved his soul ;
But henceforth, so his hope doth prophecy,
Shall fill with envious thoughts each neighbour's heart
By reason of its green fertility.

Thus then she, doubting, held within her soul
Debate, whether she yet should mute abide,
Trusting unto the gods' propitious power,
And to some circumstance of mortal life,
Such as befalleth men on the broad earth ;

Or should she, treading down all dread of shame,
Draw back the veil of silence from her soul,
And show him, fearless, the unmaimed truth ?
“ I might declare to him ”—thus ran her thoughts—
“ All evils that attend a servile life
In this fair Western land wherein he dwells,
Cut off from hope of freedom, and return
Unto his friends. Is not such life a grief
To all men who, once having breathed the breath,
Divinest, of soul-quickenings liberty,
Stagnate in vile conditions with chained hands,
Subject to brutal scoffs of conquerors,
Hunger, and thirst, and blows from the rude lash,
Wherewith men plough their greatly-bruised sides.
Then might I shape to him that other dream,
A life bright-rosed with all delights of love ;
Soft arms around him for the iron chain ;
Hands, taught of love, even to his slightest needs
Ministering ; for the rough prison fare—
Bread of oppression, and salt drink of tears—
Delicate cates, and wine full filled with fire,
Such as men hunger for, desiring much,
Stintless provided by my fingers soft,
That lovingly do labour for his weal.
Then for the couch of stone, hard, icy cold,
O'erstrewn with scanty sprinkling of damp straw,
Such as he sleeps on in his dungeon-cell,
A couch in silken raiment garmented,
Which should call Sleep from the extremest heaven,
Wherein she refuges from anxious hearts ;
And should compel her, as a chained slave,
To wait upon the slumberer's utmost will.
Also for hard scoffs, and the brutal jest,

He should have pleasant words, rehearsing love,
And all things that a woman's heart might give
Unto the warrior, whose is her desire.
Then might I say to him, 'Gaze now on this,
And on that other life. Say, wilt thou choose
A life most sad, bitter with all contempt,
And weary with the grief of unearned blows.
When that fair other life attends thy will?—
A life that might the very gods themselves
Cause to stoop down from their high thrones in heaven,
And wear awhile the robe of mortal flesh.'
Shall I say such like words? He is a man;
And such things are much prized among men.
But could I win his love buying it thus?
Would it be love, if bought by earthly gift?
Alas! I should but seem to have his love;
For he would bow his thought but through constraint,
And through despair of heart, deeming hope lost,
With light of happier days. I would not have
Even his love, though prized more than red gold,
Or gems, or all earth's treasured things of price,
As by necessity; for to my soul
Love seemeth not love if not freely given;
But rather is it but a mockery-love,
Which profits not who giveth or receives;
Even as a crown, bestowed in utter scorn
On captive brows, giveth an evil joy
To him who crowns, and paineth him who wears.
He must yield freely to me that I crave,
Or else my wordless heart must pine in vain."

Thus Mawrawh thought, close communing in her heart;
And still she grieved, and still her lips were dumb,
Seeing her maidenhood allowed not speech.

CANTO XV.

OVER the plains, a host of weary men,
Dragged the retreating army its slow length,
Like to a serpent which, with deadly fangs,
Having essayed, in sultry harvest time,
To slay some labourer, with hookèd knife
Toiling amid the wheat, is smitten sore,
And fleeth silently ; dragging his coils,
Much bruised and gashed, over the stony plains,
Seeking his caverned refuge on the cliff,
That unto heaven lifts its ambitious head.
And wheresoe'er he passeth there is left
A stain ensanguined on the herbless ground,
Which showeth to the stern pursuing foes
His fugitive path. Thus on his track amain
Passes the rustic rout, weaponed in haste
With club or implement of husbandry,
Urged on by vengeance, thinking cruel thoughts.
So past King Arvan's army on their way,
Leaving unto the river waves a stain
Redder than that which floweth from the grape,
When trodden by the vintage men. Black smoke
Involved the heavens as with a mourning garb,
Hiding their march. For, ere they northwards past,
They fired the corn stores, and the villages,

And all the woods, leaving but blood and flame
A prey unto the victors. Toilsomely
They journeyed on, bearing the gathered spoils
Of hundred cities, plundered by their hands
Upon their southward march of victory.
Even as a lion, driven by shepherd hands
Back to his lair, bears in his gory mouth
Some kid which he hath taken from the fold.
But as he, weakened by his many wounds,
Droppeth the spoil, so chanced it with the host.
The fodder failed for the many beasts ;
And first they left behind the unneeded food,
Then all the curious robes woven with toil,
And silver ornaments of unknown worth,
Which they, by lavish shedding of much blood,
Had purchased to themselves. All these they flung
Away in the great horror of the flight.
At last food failed them—for the peopled land
Had been laid waste 'neath their advancing feet,
They fearing not defeat. Then Irach bent
The march through other shores, even through the world
That lieth far off toward the Western sea,
Hoping to baffle thus the avenger's sword,
And win refreshment for the needy host.
But wheresoe'er they came fresh foes arose,
As from the earth forthspringing, as green blades
Spring up uncounted in the ploughèd fields
When early rains fall softly, and the sun
Looks forth at intervals from out the door
Of his cloud-tent, and woos them unto life.

Still dragged the host its wounded length along
Through swarming foes, and over desert plains,

And through black forests unpierced by the sun,
Journeying by Irach's will toward the west.
Yet, when they caught sight of the inland sea,
The weary host rejoiced, shouting great shouts
Of clamorous welcome ; for the water past,
They knew themselves safe from pursuing foes.
Also from land to land, where the twinned shores
Approach their verdure, stretched a broad, fair bridge
Fashioned of rafts—for Irach, wise of heart,
Had sent forth all the fleetest of the host,
And all the riders on swift-footed steeds,
To build their path over the glittering wave,
While, with the bravest of the Northern land,
Himself delayed the march of Emeth's arms,
And gave yet longer respite for the flight.
On every ridge, in every forest way
He stood, strong in the courage of his heart,
Barring the road ; and though day after day
King Emeth's host, still gathering, swept them back,
As with a broom the labourer sweeps the leaves
Backward along the path, yet won they time,
Renewing still the fight. So when the host,
Slow journeying, had past across the bridge,
The rear-guard, led of Irach, to the shores
Was slowly driven by Emeth's warrior swords.

Then Irach past. But ere he left the shore,
Men fired the brushwood and the withered grass,
Far down along the margin of the lake.
Fanned by the wind, the red flame fiercely rose ;
And at the first, over the nodding trees
Soared the black smoke, with flickering tongues of
fire,

But soon unto the sky the giant flame
Stretched for broad leagues, destroying all the lands—
As on a traveller, who, secure of heart,
Light whistling, fares forth through green forest ways,
From out the long grass of his hidden lair,
Sudden, with awful roar, a tawny beast,
A lion, who, still couchant in the reeds,
Watched his advance, springs through the air to slay—
Aghast the wanderer stands, no time is his
To turn or fly, or draw his shining sword,
So panic-stricken, with a short sharp cry
Of utter fear he waiteth sudden death.
Thus, upon Emeth's eager, victor host,
Sprang forth to slay the red rejoicing flame.
Then stood the Western warriors all amazed,
Seeing all hope of saving flight denied.
Utter confusion fell upon the ranks,
Circled by fire. A greatly bitter cry
Rose from the lost host, cleaving unto heaven,
Appealing against fate. But the red flames,
Greedy to eat man's flesh, in all-deaf ears
Received the voice. Upon the ensigns fair,
Adornèd with much gold, with blood of men
Preservèd oft in fight ; and on the beasts
Of burden, and their stores of pleasant food ;
And on the limbs of Emeth's chosen men,
The eating fire made its all-pleasant meal,
Till where the soldiers stood few hours before,
Rejoicing in their triumph, strong to slay,
Nothing was left, but blackened trunks of trees,
And formless mounds of ashes. Not a life
Had 'scaped the slaughter, save the light-armed men,

Riders on horses, tribes from the far South,
Who, upon either side of Emeth's van,
Sheltered the advance. These marked the gathering
blaze,

And o'er the plains, pursued by the red death,
Fled, with sharp spurs deep in their chargers' sides,
To Emeth's central host, that lay encamped
Upon the rocky flanks of the great hills.
These, having timely warning, fired the grass
Around them, fighting thus the flame with flame,
Then drew them backward high up on the hills
And waited the event. The sea of fire
Surged down upon them swiftly, islanding
The army mountain-refuged ; till they looked,
From their safe fortress, on wide tossing waves,
That all around involved the wasted lands
In a great, funeral winding-sheet of flame.

Four days over the plains destruction reigned ;
Then the black, volumed smoke rolled slow away,
And Emeth's soldiers looked on scorched lands,
Blackened with flame, where no green thing remained,
Witness of former life, but being failed.

So through the black lands past King Emeth's host,
Silently backward on their slow retreat,
Seeking a surer path to Arvan's realms.
But Arvan's host marched on with lightened hearts,
For now they hoped King Emeth's power destroyed ;
Or if not all, yet blasted by the might
And fury of the hurricane of flame.
So that they should, with unpursued steps,
More slowly tread the pathway of defeat.
This also did they with content of mind

Journeying for many days, feeling at heart
Great trust in Irach, whose wise thought availed
To save the army in its utter need.
So that though still the shadow of defeat
Clung to their banners, yet their courage rose,
They hoping new days to redress the old.
But when they came unto the Osnath's land,
A new death greeted them. For the earth's brow
Was darkened here, and wrinkled overmuch
With the black ridges of the foodless hills,
As with a frown eterne. Along their crests
The savage tribes, lords of the echoing bow,
Or skilled to hurl the dart, or sling the stone,
Past with fleet steps that mocked the mountain goat's ;
Or close-masked by the brushwood and the crags
Lurked, with quick eyes, watching the toilsome march
Of the great army through the strait defile.

Thus journeyed Arvan's soldiers many days
Through the black mountains, fearing as they went,
From every crag, perils averse to life.
Lastly they came unto a certain way,
Where the cliffs, narrowing much, hemmed in the vale,
Even as with walls. On the left hand, the crags
Sheer down descended to the herbless ledge,
Along whose narrow road the army wound.
For fearful was the way by which it went.
Beneath, upon the right hand, yawned a chasm
Dizzy, girt in by precipices black,
Which from the ledge reached down unto the wave
That brawled below, faint-heard, and scarcely seen ;
For the eye scarce could pierce the fearful gloom,
Which filled, as with a moonless night, th' abyss.

Across the stream, once more the cliffs arose
Steep into heaven, bearing upon their heads
Crowns wrought of many clouds, ardent with fire,
Which the bright Sun-god gave, ere that he past
Away from earth in the red sunset hour.

Now Irach, ere the host proved the deep pass,
Fearing surprise, called on the Southern tribes,
Men who served Arvan in the olden days,
Bidding them climb with speed the girdling crags,
Clearing the summit of the ambushed foe.
Unto the van he also sent wise words,
Showing the danger near, counselling halt.
But the rough warriors, in the long retreat
Having lost discipline, regarded not
The chieftain's counsel, but with eager haste
Plunged forward yet, with disarrayèd ranks,
Into the black defile, whose gaping jaws
Received them, as a serpent's yawning mouth
Receives a fluttering, foolish-hearted bird.

Then Irach sent swift messengers again,
Bidding them turn and draw the central host,
With many thousands of the rearward van,
Back to the wider vale, halting the troops,
Till the light-footed archers cleared the crags ;
For that he feared treachery in his soul.
And even while men sped at his command,
Bearing his message to th' entangled van,
Far to the front there rose a dull, deep roar,
The shout of battle, the descending crash
Of giant rocks, hurled from their place of rest.
For the fierce tribes, safe in their vantage post,
Having long stored the crags upon the hills,

Loosening, had hurled them on the man-filled vale.
Thereon King Arvan's archers gained the crest,
With drawn swords fiercely charging on the foe ;
And some they hurled down headlong from the rocks,
And others smote and slew even where they stood,
Till there remained in his place not one
Of all who wrought destruction in the host
Short space before. Only some light-armed men
Fled backward o'er the bleak hills, and escaped,
Being unpursued, bearing the tale of fear
Unto their kindred nations of the wilds.
They, terror-stricken, stood aloof from strife,
Fearing King Arvan's sword, strong in defeat.

Thenceforward had the royal army rest
For many days, and through the dim defiles
Made their slow way, emerging at the last
Once more in sunlight on the open plains.
But thinned, and much enfeebled was the host
That issued from the mountains, unlike that
Which, from the mighty city of the Rha,
Had marched elate as to sure victory.

Forward they went through light of many days
And gloom of nights, o'er the unpeopled plains,
Where but the long grass grew, or forest waved,
Nor cities shone, nor homes of living men ;
But the wild tribes, hunters of bear, or boar,
Or forceful bison, homeless roamed the earth,
A foe to all men, whom all nations loathed,
For cruelty was to them as a dam,
Out of whose breasts they had sucked evil life,
Inheriting her nature. Where they came
Men fled before them into walled towns,

Shunning their savage malice. They prevailed
In savageness above all sons of men,
Flaying the wounded even where they lay,
Robbing the prisoners of their orbs of sight,
To leave them helpless on the howling waste,
A prey to beasts more merciful than they,
In that they slew their victims torturing not.
Yet Arvan's host, though compassed by the tribes
Who, desert-born, prowled o'er the manless waste,
Marched peacefully, being yet strong of heart,
Mighty in numbers still, though thinned by war,
And famine and disease ; and a great dread
Was on the desert tribes of Arvan's sword,
Shielding his soldiers in their hour of need.

To them, thus travelling, from the Northern gates
Of the blue heavens, white Winter journeying came,
Over the icy pavement of his realm
Swift passing. Wheresoe'er his footsteps turned
The earth grew pale, his keen breath froze the air,
Till all the life of herbs failed with the cold.
Then on the vanquished fell yet bitterer need
Than all that they had known on their retreat.
With painful feet that scarce upheld the frame,
They dragged their bodies o'er the waste of snow.
Strength failed them to endure their armour's weight ;
Then were the shields and falchions flung aside,
And weaponless the soldiers struggled on,
Through the dim hours of the despairful day.
The prey-birds stooped from heaven, a countless swarm,
To rend the dead, strewed on the army's track.
The wild wolves and the bears incessant marched,
Fleshing their teeth on limbs of valiant men.

When the night fell, men sought unblest repose ;
For the dread God of Death was present there,
Smiting the warriors in the silent hours.
Men feared the gentle gift of easeful Sleep,
Knowing it fateful in that land of death ;
For, when the grey morn struggled from the East,
The dead men slept upon their couch of snow,
Unwakened by the twilight's glimmering cold—
A grim-faced company, exceeding large.
Even round the watch-fires frozen soldiers lay,
For that the cold was great. Some with iced limbs
Frost-bitten, still alive, lifted vain hands,
Imploring, to their comrades, asking death
To free them from their griefs. On these the tribes,
Who held the wild lands, came when Arvan's host
Had passed away, slaying them instantly,
Stripping their bodies of each sheltering garb ;
Then leaving their bare corpses to the wolves.
The cold winds blew unpitying o'er the waste,
And, smitten by the anger of the gods,
The great host dwindled to a march-worn band
Of fear-filled fugitives. Thus through the gloom
And bitterness of winter, numbed, cast down,
Despairing, toward the city of the Rha,
They wearily passed over the snow-clad earth.
Then op'd King Arvan slowly his great eyes,
Sense-ruled once more, but dull and lustreless,
And saw great Irach on his armoured horse,
Riding beside the litter of his lord,
Ruling the wild retreat ; and tempering still
Its horrors with wise counsels, and the might
Of a brave soul that still asserts its strength

Unquenched by failure, and unblest defeat.
Him summoned he with wan, imploring eyes,
And lips that vainly strove for utterance
To show his wishes, nearer to his side.
Then, when the warrior's head over the couch
Of the sick monarch stooped obediently,
In a low whisper Arvan sought to link
His life once more unto the severed Past,
Speaking a word into the chieftain's ears—
“Irach, how went the day when the sword failed?”

And Irach answered him a mournful word,
“The battle went against thy sons, oh ! king ;
For that the gods, envious of thy great fame,
Denied the victory, which in old days
Was where thy falchion shone.” Then Arvan said,
To him replying, “Irach, thou hast been
Ever a faithful servant to thy lord,
Mightiest of all my chieftains. Hearken, now.
Lo ! I will ask of thee one service more.
Do it with willing heart ; thus honouring me,
Thy lord, yet once again. So shall my soul,
That erelong shall be freed from mortal clay,
Companion of the gods, with whom of right
I shall sit throned beyond the dome of blue,
Having been raised above the herd of men
By my great fame, and by my valiant heart,
And arm unmatched in fight, look down on thine
All favouringly, knowing that thou art true
Beyond all men who dwell on the green earth.
Hearken ! should Arvan live when his bright fame
Is tarnished, and the sceptre from his hands
Wrenched by remorseless fate, and on his brow

The bright crown cloven, that was won of old
By battle toils, and shedding of much blood,
Other men's, and his own? He may not live:
His name is stained. Irach, thou yet art true,
Faithfullest of my chieftains, Arvan's friend.
Draw thou thy battle blade; with its sharp edge
Release thy king from this too anxious life,
Healing his spirit, that he may have rest."

Him Irach answered, being moved at heart,
Hearing such words from the world's conqueror,
His own dread lord, honoured of all his heart,
"Not so, oh, king! lay not on this thy chief
So great an anguish; sooner shall my blade
Be dipped deep in my heart's inmost cell,
Drinking its gore, than shed one drop of thine."

But Arvan answered, "Fame hath past from me;
And what is life defrauded of all fame?
An evil thing which should be drowned in gore."

Then Irach said, "Thy fame even yet may shine,
With brighter glory than in earlier days.
'Tis but a cloud that overshades the sun,
And the bright orb still sitteth throned in heaven,
Nor stoopeth to his setting. Thou shalt yet
Plant living feet on thy foe's subject neck.
Then live, oh, king! Live thou, to spoil the lands,
To be the glory of the Northmen's hearts,
What were the world if thy great name were gone?
And now, behold, hope hath not left our host
Though sorely smitten, vexèd by defeat,
And warred upon by nations, and the gods.
Know that we journey through the desert lands
Seeking the Northern coast. There shall our powers

'Stablish their shaken strength, and wait the foe
With heart renewed." Then Arvan answered him :
" Irach, thou art no dreamer of vain dreams ;
No beardless boy, who babbles idle things ;
But a man bronzed by suns of many years,
Having much knowledge both of lands and men,
Wherefrom grows wisdom. Speak thou unto me
Words true and fearless, showing me thy thought.
Thou hast seen much of war. Thy sword hath reaped
Red harvests in a hundred battlefields
Beside thy lord. Thinkest thou that the realm
May yet be saved ?" Then Irach said again,
To him replying : " Arvan ! king of men,
Mightiest of monarchs, hearken to my voice.
I am thy chieftain, wholly true to thee,
Having shed blood for thee both in my youth,
Also in later years. Now will I show
Things as they are, hiding no whit from thee,
But laying bare our sorrow to the core.
Hear thou ! Our host hath dwindled to a band
Of fear-filled fugitives. 'Tis not man's steel
That hath o'ercome them. Famine and disease,
Frost that doth enter being's inmost cell,
And smites with chill the limbs, or overpowers
Th' enfeebled frame, 'whelming the soul in night :
These things have 'minished greatly our array,
So that, though brave our warriors, often proved
In battle, long inured to toils of war,
And though of those who once at thy behest
Drew well-ground swords, the valiantest remain,
Through danger and distress, true to their king
And duty ; shielding, through the stormy hours

Of the retreat, their banners from all scathe,
Bulwarking them with their own bodies' flesh ;
Yet even these, cast down through long distress,
Orderless drag o'er the unmeasured earth
March-wearied limbs, a crowd of outworn men,
To whom death sheweth a desired thing
And life most bitter. Yet they, unsubdued,
Being most brave of all who draw life-breath,
Have hearts unwavering ; and, methinks, received
In the broad bosom of our own fair land,
Would win back strength once more. Then would their
 hearts

Be spurred, by sharp revenge for honour lost,
To overdo all warrior deeds, that stand
Recorded in the annals of the past.
Gain we but time ; haply we gain yet more :
We will lay waste the fair fields of the North
Before the feet of the advancing foe,
Leaving no grain of wheat within the barn,
No creature good for food in the green fields.
And as the fisher, with his meshèd nets,
Sweeps all the swarming fishes of the deep
On to the pebbled ridges of the shore,
So will we gather all the souls that breathe,
Removing them from out the menaced lands
Into a place of safety. We the while,
Sure 'stablishèd behind the giant walls
Of the Rha city, will await the foe ;
Who, wearied with the march o'er desert lands,
And no more heartened by a late success,
Will, by the gods, unto the Northern swords
Be given, as meat unto the prey-beast's teeth.

Oh, Arvan ! I have spoken. Be it thine
To weigh the thought, cleaving to that is right."

Then to the leader, Arvan, king of men,
Spake, heaving from his heart a heavy groan :
" Oh, Irach ! wise thy thoughts, and thy heart brave ;
Faithful thou also art o'er sons of men.
Thy counsel seemeth meet in this our need ;
And haply the great gods will, by thy hands,
'Stablish the tottering fortunes of the realm.
For me, my strength is broken by my wounds,
And my arm powerless to uphold the sword ;
But thou shalt have the warrant of my name
For aught thy will determines. It may be
That thou shalt rescue yet the Northland's homes
From fire, and sword, and man's polluting tread ;
For multitudes of men in the North land
Yet live to wield the steel—though the chief swords,
That fought for Arvan in the days of old,
Are wanting in the ranks. Also the walls
Of our imperial city of the Rha
Are strong as a sea-fronting precipice,
That laughs the wild rush of the waves to scorn.
Yet think not I will blame thee if thou fail,
And hope deceive thy heart even as mine ;
For hands divine fashion all human lives,
And by their potent will from sworded hosts
The might departeth, and the city's strength
Becomes a vain thing to repel the foe ;
For brazen gates delay not unseen fate,
And the gods' feet tread down the walls of stone."

To him the chieftain Irach spake again :
" Yea, Arvan, king of men, I know this well,

Having seen realms o'erthrown, and death of kings.
The gods are mightier than weak-handed man ;
All strength is vain if that they doom his fall.
Yet—for we know not what decree of fate
Lies hidden in the future's shadowy world—
We will do all that doth become the brave,
Deserving triumph even though we fail."

Then Arvan's eyes flashed the old battle-fire,
As from the bosom of a thunder-cloud,
That much hath lightened through a day of gloom,
Gleam forth the latest flashes of the storm.
"Truth, Irach," said he, "man can only die.
If triumph's sword in our defrauded hands
Break, disappointing all our golden dreams,
Then we will fall as warrior-men should fall,
Even as the sun that to his setting stoops,
More glorious in his dying majesty,
Than in the splendour of his noontide glow."

But here the weariness of life-draining wounds
O'ercame the great king, and from out his eyes
The fierce light waned, and he sank fainting back,
And on the pillows of his litter lay,
Signing to Irach of his audience closed.

Thenceforward, many days of onward march,
Arvan and Irach communed of the war,
Devising plans to meet the present need ;
So on a day they, speaking, heard afar
A clamour of glad voices, high upraised
In exultation. Then they felt a joy
Had dawned upon the weary host at last.
Thus in fair sooth it was. For to the men,
The soldiers, dragging o'er the desert waste

Limbs failing much from cold and foodlessness,
While comrades sank with every mile of way,
And the dead strewed the army's onward track.
At last over the waste high towers appeared,
And walls, and roofs, even sweet homes of men ;
Then knew they all their perils overpast,
It being Arvan's city, girt with walls,
Provisioned for defence, a fortress town
That fenced the western frontier of the realm.
Then shouted all the men an eager shout,
Joyed at the near deliverance from woe ;
And from their ranks the armed men forward
rushed

To feast their souls upon the pleasant sight,
Whilst weary limbs leapt from delight of hope ;
Some laughed, some sang old ditties of their youth ;
Soldiers, grey-bearded, for an instant flung
All warrior pride away. Some to the gods
Bent lowly knees, and praised their gracious help ;
While eyes unused to pity's sacred dew
O'erflowed at last, wet with rejoicing tears.
Again the army raised jubilant shouts,
Even as sailors on some sinking ship
See in the waste of waves a friendly isle,
And raise glad cries, hoping fair succour nigh.

Now when the city's men saw o'er the plains
The host approaching, they from out its gates
Marched, young and old, bearing in willing hands
Their eager succour. But when they drew nigh,
Seeing the soldiers' abject wretchedness,
And all the misery that weighèd down
The army's strength, as a great burden weighs

Unto the dust the frame of a weak man,
They raised high the howl of grief, and flung
White dust upon their heads ; while women tore
Their shining hair, and rent their seemly robes,
Of cunning needlework ; and greybeards plucked
The silver tresses of their ancient beards,
Being sore grievèd in their inmost hearts.

Then they received the warriors, resting them,
Giving them meat and wine, binding their wounds,
Rendering unto them strength ; showing their love
As unto sons long lost, lately restored.
Also they told them rumours of the North,
All that had chanced since they went forth to war.
Thus learned they that the city of the Rha
Was held by Chavah and the Eastern men
Risen in revolt, who behind giant walls,
Establishing their hearts, having great stores
Of food for many days, purposing war,
Defied the might of Arvan's warrior powers.
But all the Northland still obeyed the king.
And even now the royal city lay
Encompassed by a newly gathered host,
Who, under Arvan's chiefs, warred on revolt.
Having good hopes to win the city fair
For their lord once again. This having heard,
After short rest the army journeyed on,
By Arvan's will, being intent to link
Their strength unto the newly gathered bands ;
And after many days the mighty towers
Of the Rha city met the warriors' eyes ;
Which they perceiving were sore vexed in soul.
For when they stood before the city gates

They found the brazen doors firm closed and barred,
And marked the Eastern banners on the walls,
So joining their array unto the bands
New levied, that were camped before the walls,
They closed the city in, dooming its fall.

CANTO XVI.

EMETH, the king, upon the Western wilds,
Proving mischance, struggled with evil fate ;
But Mawrawh and Prince Ervar, each on each,
Gazed with increasing love day after day,
Till the great pleasure, which they came to take
Each in the other's life, grew into pain,
They longing ever with intenser strength
To blend in one the separate flames of life
That burned within their love-tormented breasts ;
Yet neither spake as yet confessing words ;
For Ervar would not humble his heart's pride,
Pleading with amorous words of sweet complaint
Unto the daughter of his country's foe :
And Mawrawh was withheld by maiden shame,
That strengthened in her as her passion grew,
Till even her very eyes told not her woe.
Yet still they met for converse ; for the god
Honoureth himself by thus compelling hearts,
Severed by fate and customs of the earth,
Into the linked captivity of love.

While thus they lingered, feeding on love thoughts,
That were as poison to their peace of mind,
Yet saying not one word revealing love,
Emeth, the king, returnèd from the march

And vain pursuit, throughout the desolate lands,
Of Arvan's host, escaping from his sword.
He came back greatly grievèd at his heart,
Filled with much rage, having beheld his men
By thousands slaughtered in the storm of fire,
Of Irach kindled through the world of woods.
Then, in his wrath, he spake fierce words of
 might,
Dooming the captives to the death of flame,
Repaying thus on Arvan's captive chiefs
Anguish of heart for his own war-men slain.
Thus then he spake, "Make ready on the mead,
Far reaching, green, without the city walls,
Pyres, mounds of wood, well dried, exceeding large,
Fitted to burn bodies of many men,
For by my soul, gift of the most high gods,
Which quickens all my body with its flame,
The captive chiefs, even all ta'en in war,
Whether sore wounded, prisoners after strife,
Or coward-hearted fearers of my sword,
Who, being all unharmed, yielded themselves
Unwounded to the chain, much dreading death,
These all, even each man shall die the death,
Feeding the red flames on the council plain.
Thus shall our wrongs be paid back on their heads,
As they have done to us, burning our van,
Thousands of warrior-men with eating flames,
Forest-born, spreading o'er the league-long plains;
So will we do to them, even to all,
Who, captive ta'en in war, wear prisoner's chains.
For ill it were in us, being a king,
To sit down patient underneath great wrong,

Such as was done to us and to our land,
Nor seek to wipe it out in foemen's blood."

These tidings when they came to Mawrawh's ears
She, not enduring that the red-lipped flame
Should feed upon the gracious, lovely limbs
Of him she loved, in her own soul took thought,
That she might save him from his unblest doom.
Wherefore she on an hour at eventide,
Dusky, when earth is half concealed in gloom,
So that men might not mark her going forth,
Came with her nurse unto the leafed wood
Which guarded from men's eyes their communing.
Then spake she unto Ervar, with quick voice,
And lips trembling with eagerness intense,
"Prince Ervar, know, the hour for speedy flight
Hath come to thee. Emeth, the king, my sire,
Doometh the captives to the death of flame.
Thou also, even as they, must die the death,
For that his wrath is great, he spareth not.
Now therefore hearken unto me, thy friend,
Who would not have thee, though a foeman, slain.
With me are means to flight, a herald's garb,
Wherein concealed thou mayest shun men's eyes,
Store also of red gold, an envoy's staff,
Such as may prove thee journeying for the king,
If adverse hands essay to bar thy flight ;
These things my slave hath with her. Take thou them.
Depart, and may the gods befriend thy way."

To her Prince Ervar hearkened, standing mute,
Till her words ceased ; then suddenly he spake,
For the thought passed from out his secret heart
Ere he was ware, or knew that he would say,

"I will not fly, oh, Mawrawh ! Without thee,
Know, life were valueless. I love thy face,
Desirous of its light above all things,
That, being most precious, are in the green earth.
Nor would I have long years of empty life,
Spoiled of the joy that is in seeing thee."

Then she, "But I shall die in this thy death.
For can I know thy life closed in red flame,
Yet bear, in strength unbroken, on my way
The burden of the life that even now,
Unweighted with this unimagined woe,
Bends me to earth through forethought of the grief ?
Slaying thyself, me too thou dost destroy—
Even me, with whom thou speakest as a friend."

Answering, he spake, "Oh ! princess, greatly loved,
Not mine the hand that would o'ergloom thy life
With shadow, that consorts not with its light.
But how shall I choose pathway of escape
That leadeth but to undesired life,
Bitterer than death, where thou shalt be no more ?"

She answered, "All things chancing on the earth
Come to the sons of men, treading swift ways,
By the all-wise will of the sovereign gods.
Who knoweth if the hours that bear away,
With strong controlling might, thee from my side,
May not again, in some white-shining days,
Restore thee once more to my wishful sight ;
Even as the ocean, on its ebbing wave,
Beyond sight bearing out some floating spoil,
Yet, turning once more with the gathering flood,
Layeth it on the erst defrauded shore.
Thus mayest thou, too, return to my waste life,

Though now reft from me by unprayed chance,
Which bears thee hence, promising not return.
But if, deaf to my supplicating words,
Thou dost abide, averse to thought of flight,
Know, then, that I shall lose thee utterly.
For, while men live, all things are possible,
And they who part may on a day return ;
But from the black realm of deaf-eared Death
No mortal, woman-born, breather of air,
Having once entered, ever yet returned.
And thou, remaining, by the doom of fire
Perishing utterly, to me art lost.
Nor will the briny flood of many tears,
Shed by these eyes, from out the ashy mounds,
Make thy life's ruddy flower shine forth anew.
Thou therefore, Ervar, harden not thy heart,
Despising warning, timely given of me,
Fly while the path of safety yet is clear :
Shield thou from harm thy life, and Mawrawh's soul."

Then Ervar said, "I would not wound thy soul.
Then if my death be unto thee a grief,
See, I will live. For life in sooth to me,
Thou loving me, will be no loathed thing.
Yet how, if I depart, shall be reknit
The severed links of our acquaintanceship ;
For love, space-severed, oft unites no more ?"

And she—"I know not fully ; for the way
Before our feet is wrapt in blinding mists
Of dim uncertainty ; yet this I deem,
The strong will maketh to itself a path,
Where weaker natures cower down in despair.
Let us be brave and true ; for noble blood

Availeth greatly, linked to noble life.
Nor should we fear our fate, like common men,
Who, having never dreamed of higher things,
Fear in their tame hearts, dreading danger much.
Now, hearken to my thought, whence may arise,
Though dimly, dawn of our deliverance.
Emeth, my royal father, with the spring,
Having renewed his armies' shattered strength,
Marcheth against the peoples of the North,
Purposing to o'erthrow their walls with fire.
I am his favoured child, nor have I prayed
Ever vain words, proffering scorned requests.
Lo ! I will speak with Emeth, the great king,
My sire, when he hath eaten pleasant meats,
And drank of the red wine he loveth best,
Wherewith he cheereth him at eventide.
Then will I come before him, with a cup
Of silver, white as moonbeams, crownèd high
With wine, ruddy as flame ; and he shall take
The cup out of my ministering hand,
Drinking thereof. Then will I kneel me down
Before him, lifting supplicating eyes,
As is my wont when that I make request.
But he will say to me with rough kind voice,
Pleasant, yet harsh, as a great voice of winds,
That snore through some grey forest's world of boughs :
' What seeketh much-loved Mawrawh of her sire ? '
Answering, will I speak straightway : ' Mighty lord !
Greatly-beloved, much-honoured ! grant to me—
Even to me, thy child—one little boon
Light granted, costing thee only the breath
Wherewith thou utterest the bounteous word.'

‘ Make forthwith thy request,’ my sire will say ;
For that he loves me well, granting me all
Child can desire, with careless, generous heart,
That giveth largely as the heart of a god ;
Even as a stream divine, that from its store
Sendeth forth wealth of waters limitless
Wave upon wave to the much-craving sea.
So shall I say to him, ‘ When that thy hosts
Pass northward with the Spring, take also me,
Thy daughter, with thy women in the tent—
Me also, being loved ; for I would share
The perils of my sire—fain too would see
The triumphs which the gods shall give thy hand,
The city of the Rha given o’er to flame.’ ”
“ Haply King Emeth will not heed thy prayer,”
Said Ervar ; “ for he knoweth that the strife
Endureth long, wasteful of lives of men ;
Since the Rha city is of walled towns,
That heavily weigh on the green-breasted earth,
Mightiest in strength ; nor will the sworded men
Enter her streets, much slaughtering at their will,
While Northern hands remain to wield the glaive.”
“ He will not say me nay,” Mawrawh replied ;
“ Yet if this thing should be, we will devise
New paths whereby to journey to our aim.”

Then Ervar, having thought a breathing space,
Revolving future perils for his love,
Fearful of chance, wrought through unproved events—
“ But if the king, thy sire, grant thy request,
And thou, with spring, companioning the host,
Com’st to the icy regions of the North,
Whereby shall I discern thy presence near ? ”

She paused, o'ermusing plans within her mind :
Her earthward-seeking eyes upon the soil
Grass-clad, yet jewelled with delightful flowers—
Gifts of the summer-tide—a space reposed,
Seeking whereby she should resolve his doubt.
Sudden the gods put in her heart a thought :
Then, stooping, from the sward she plucked a flower,
Most fair, yet common amongst earthly blooms.
This gave she straightway into Ervar's hands,
Saying, "Behold this flower ; consider well.
When the sweet spring, beloved of gods and men,
Walks in all grace o'er the renewèd lands,
Do blossoms such as these beneath her feet
Rise in their beauty, whitening Northern meads,
Even as they adorn our sun-loved plains ?"

And he—"It is a bloom common on earth.
Who doth not know it, even from a child ?
For, sleeping unslain 'neath the winter's snow,
It wakeneth aye, when the spring waxeth bright,
In the bleak North as in the sunny West—
Covering the earth with brightness. What of this ?
Wherein, too, is it linked with my desire ?"

But she—"Be this a token to thine eyes
That Mawrawh hath her promise-word redeemed.
When this same flower is given into thy hand,
Bound lightly round with azure silken thread,
Know, then, that I am present with the host
That campeth round the city of the Rha.
Also, upon the doorway of my tent,
Day after day, toward the set of sun,
I will hang festal garlands, fashioned fair,
Of this same flower ; whereby it may be known,

Shouldest thou, venturous hearted, seek the camp,
That I, thy princess, hidden from men's eyes,
Dwell, sheltered safe, behind its curtain-walls.
Thence must thou pluck me, as thine own strong heart,
And time, and the wise gods, prepare thy way.
Now knowest thou, oh ! Ervar, all my thought ;
For that my heart is towards thee, even as thine
Is towards me. Nor will this the latest hour
Of converse and of parting, suffer here
Veil of concealment, such as maiden hearts
In happier days draw round them, prone to hide
Esteem of men from whom they do esteem.
All knowest thou. Nor have I hidden aught ;
Lest things unwitted of, in after hours,
When thou art far, might sever our life's paths,
Which else had met. Oh, Ervar ! go thy way.
Use well thy knowledge. Be thou wise ; be true.
Work out our welfare, being strong to dare."

And he replied, " Yea, I will win thee yet ;
If mortal strength, and courage of my heart,
May win such treasure, Mawrawh, as thou art,
From the great gods' jealous, withholding hands."
" 'Tis well," said Mawrawh. " Be the gods thy guides.
Forget not this thy pledge, though many days
Be between me and thee. Farewell. Be true.
May every strength be with thee in thy ways."

Then Ervar with the princess joined hands,
Nor spake word more ; but each upon their path
Went mutely, as two graceful gliding snakes,
Voiceless, pass onward, down diverging ways.
After, Prince Ervar, in a thicket dense
Tarrying, disrobed his limbs, their wonted garb

Laying aside, and vesturing them anew
In alien raiment, that the eyes of men,
Blinded by the disguise, might not perceive
The captive, flying from the chain and death,
Nor stay his fugitive steps. Next, taking thought,
He bent his path far down toward the South,
Deeming pursuit would suddenly arise,
Endeavouring after him along the road
That led directest to the Northern land ;
There failing, shortly, like a baffled hound,
That, having lost the scent, refrains from search,
The chase would cease, deeming the prey escaped.
Thus he, by circling ways bending his steps,
Might reach safe refuge, far from Emeth's sword.

Journeying through many paths and through waste
lands,

Where track was none (since the much-toiling feet
Of travelling men full seldom crossed the wilds),
Through the obscure night and sun-heated day,
Still striving onwards, snatching briefest space
For rest, when strength fled his outwearied frame ;
At last Prince Ervar gained the ocean shore,
Sand-margined, glad with light of salt sea-waves,
And odorous with perfume of much brine.
Thereon, with a great gladness in his heart,
Like his, who, 'scaping from captivity
After much suffering, and endurance long
Of many woes such as afflict mankind,
Happening on happier hours, with joy of soul,
Beholds at hand an unawaited friend,
And gazes on his face with thoughts of peace ;
On the soft sand, outstretching his tired limbs,

Long hours he lay, rejoicing much in rest.
Afterwards he, arising, went his way,
With frame new strengthened by thrice blessed repose.
Along the edge of the dark-billowed sea
He passed, seeking a refuge. Every wave
That, curling greatly, beat the echoing strand,
Then upward smoothly gliding, edged with foam,
Slid in smooth beauty o'er the level sands,
Refreshed his heart with gift of ocean life,
Abounding, such as dwells in the salt main,
Grateful to weary limbs of mortal men.

Last, having overwandered leagues of shore,
Finding no resting place ; for on that coast
Wild, greatly rude, houses of men were few,
He came unto a home of fisher folk,
A hamlet small, of the great world unknown,
Where, tarrying, he renewed his minished powers,
Remaining certain days. These cherished him
With fish and bread, and gave him counsel words,
Whereby he might attain a friendly port,
Well stored with wingèd ships, such as he sought,
Desirous o'er the waters of the deep,
'Scaping from Emeth's realm, to seek his home.
Thus came he slowly journeying on his ways
Unto the port, refuge of ocean ships.
One bark he found therein, that sailing far
Through circling paths would bear him o'er the wave
Unto the southern shore of Arvan's realm.
Therefore he made pact with the merchant man,
Lord of the broad, black-sided, ocean ship,
And past rejoicing greatly from the land.

Long days, with favouring breeze, over the main

They made their prosperous way. Then a great storm,
Sent of some god, rose from its azure cave
Beneath the waves of the earth-clasping sea,
And mightily assailed them. So the ship,
Vexed by the fury of the hurricane,
Sped like a hare before a furious hound,
That straineth every limb, seeking its life.
But the black tempest lay upon her sore,
Till, with masts broken, drinking bitter draughts
Through all her riven sides, she struck one morn
Upon a wild land in the southern seas,
An island fenced with rough precipitous rocks,
Whereon the ship, dashed by the sea-wave's might,
Brake into fragments small. So from the wreck
Few men escaped. The more part, by the mouth,
Brine-dripping, of the waves, up-swallowed, died,
Perishing miserably. But to the shore
Some ten, being rescued, upon floating bales
And fragments of the ship, close-clinging came,
Into a little bay, with shelving marge,
Protected from the fury of the tide ;
Prince Ervar also with them 'scaped white Death.

Weary they sat beside the ocean flood,
A doleful company of outworn men.
Then stood up Ervar, being brave of heart,
Untroubled, having an heroic mind.
"Comrades," he said, "we die abiding here,
For succour to this wild and desolate bay
Comes not, nor will it seek us where we lie.
Arise then ! let us climb the beetling cliffs,
And see this land, whereto we, driven of waves,
Have wandered, guided by the gods' strong hands.

Nor lay we hope aside ; since they who brought
Can rescue us from peril, being great."

To him the seamen hearkened, and arose.
They climbed the cliffs, and searched the hills around,
If haply help might serve them in their need.

Now the strange isle whereto the prince had come,
He and his comrades, driven by stress of storm,
Was peopled by a race of savage men,
Hunters of beasts, slingers of slaying stones,
Good with the spear, wearers of skins of beasts.
These daubed their skins with colours many-hued ;
Nor did they reverence hospitality ;
Nor showed they kindness unto stranger men ;
Nor sacrificèd, fearing not the gods.
These men, when they perceived the shipwrecked crew,
Assailed them straight, binding their captive hands
With thongs of hide, and tight-drawn ropes of cord ;
Then, scourging them along the rugged ways,
They drove them, like a herd of weary swine,
Unto the market-place of Onoo's town,
Where stranger men are sold to slavery.
But Onoo was the queen of the wild isle,
Ruling men as she listed, with all might,
No man denying to her all her will.
Youthful she was, and fair of countenance.
Adown her shoulders, like a golden cloak,
Hung the long mantle of her yellow hair,
Bright to the eye as a suntinted cloud.
Clad also was she in the spoils of chase ;
And her bare bosom and her shoulders brown,
Much painted, flashed back on the gazer's eye
Gleams as of rainbow glory. Thus she came

Where Ervar and his men, with bowèd heads
And hands fast bound, awaited sad their doom,
And stood over against them. There her eyes
Fell on Prince Ervar, where he stood aside
A little from his fellows. Weak, o'erworn,
Hungered for lack of food, yet showed he fair,
With polished, gleaming body, raimentless,
And brave face lighted up with resolute eyes,
Strong in extreme of his adversity.

She saw, she loved him in her woman's heart,
Greatly, for the bright beauty of his youth,
Yet more for patient bearing of distress ;
And a great longing in her painted breast
Arose to be the sovereign of his will.

Then said she to the men who stood anigh,
"Lead this slave to our dwelling, he is ours."
And Ervar looked upon her where she stood.
"Nay," said he, "for I will not be thy slave,
Since slavery is alien to my will ;
But bid thy warriors lift their shining spears
And strike me to the earth, ending my grief."

But she replied, answering unto his words
And to his signs : "I will not have thee slain,
Fair captive, for I only work thy good.
Thou therefore follow straightway, fearing not.

So Onoo's warriors severed Ervar's thongs,
And led him to the dwelling, a rude hut,
Built huge with disbranched trunks of forest pines,
And hung around with shields and skins of beasts,
And skulls of hostile chiefs, o'erthrown in war.
For Onoo's father, in his days of rule,
Had built his power on many a battle-field,

Establishing his realm on deaths of men,
Till every armed band turned to swift flight,
The whole wide isle bowed underneath his yoke.

In the broad centre of the tree-built hall,
A fire, well stored with resinous logs of wood,
Sent up bright glancing flame and curling smoke,
Silvery as are the locks of extreme age,
Toward the roof-gap, that opened a wide door,
Wherethrough the wood-smoke might arise to heaven.
There did Queen Onoo, sitting on her couch
Of tawny hides, address to Ervar words—
Words by a well-skilled slave interpreted,
Requiring of him both his name and land.

And Ervar lifting up his voice replied,
“ Queen Onoo, I am Ervar, Irach's son,
Who with King Arvan, monarch of the North,
Marched westward, leading many myriad swords.
But Arvan's host was overthrown in fight,
For Emeth conquered, such the gods' high will.
Then was I left sore wounded on the field,
Senseless ; and Emeth's servants searching round,
Found, and considering, knew me for a prince.
Therefore they bound my wounds, bearing me thence
To captive chains ; but I, my strength restored,
Flying my bondage, gained the sandy shore,
Thence sailing on a black-ribbed ocean ship,
Trusting to gain King Arvan's southern realm,
Surprised by the great might of adverse storms,
Wind-driven, came we to this rock girt isle.
The rest thou knowest. Am I not thy slave ? ”

But Onoo listening to his silver speech,
Regardful also of his beauteous form,

Lovèd him greatly in her untamed heart,
And answered him with comfortable words.
“ Rest thou in peace. Whate’er thy life has been,
Whether thou wert in thine own land a chief,
Or but as other men, thy face is fair,
Nor shall men vex thee, being Onoo’s slave.”

But he replied not, answering not her speech
As would a base man, whose flesh is but mire ;
For that he scorning slavery, rested mute.

So in the queen’s hut he abode a while,
Aye thinking of escape ; prying around
If haply he might chance on means of flight.
Now on a day, Onoo to Ervar said,
Wearied by his long silence, and sad face,
“ Thou silent slave, show me thy history.
Wert thou in truth a chief in other days ?”

And he replied, scorning his life and her,
“ Whate’er I was, it matters little now,
For I am but a slave ; and unto slaves
The past is even as if it had not been.
What joy is there to the discrownèd king,
Remembering his vanished diadem ?
Thus unto freemen, being no more free,
Lost liberty, remembered, adds to grief.
Say I was noble in the ancient days ;
Wherein now am I better than a serf,
Being despoiled of all that was mine own—
Wealth, and my name—sweet freedom—pleasant
friends ?

Ask me not therefore record of my life,
Wherethrough I only shall add grief to grief.
But this thing will I tell thee : that I said

When first thou askedst, even that was true ;
I am a chief—Ervar, Prince Irach's son."

She, looking on him, saw his words were truth,
And that he too was noble, to be loved.
Therefore she strove no more against her heart ;
A mighty passion grew within her breast ;
And when she looked on him day after day,
She said, " Wilt thou not love me ? " and again,
" Wilt thou not love me ? " And the prince replied :
" I am a slave, thyself hast said the word :
What hath a slave to do with thoughts of love ? "

But she—" Thou art no slave, but free as wind
To come and go ; nor shall men check thy feet.
Only, leave not the land. My heart dies down
For wanting of thy love ; even as a plant,
Sun-parched, desirous greatly of sweet rain,
Withers for lack of moisture. Love thou me ? "

But Ervar said : " This thought is far from me
That thou shouldst link a woman's life with mine.
For my love liveth in a far-off land ;
Hers am I, nor will yield me unto thee."

Then she, angered in mood, to him replied
With fierce words, frowning greatly with her brow—
" Either thou shalt espouse me, all thy life
Surrendering unto me, being my love ;
Or I will have thee hewn in pieces small,
Feeding with fragments of thy body fair
The scaly-hided fishes of the sea."

But he replied to her, filled full of hate,
For that he loathed her and her savage thoughts :
" According to thy power work thou thy will,
Bloodthirsty one ! who hast a woman's form,

Yet not a woman's mind. Me would'st thou slay ?
Know thou may'st slay me, not constrain my love."

She gazed upon him, as he fearless stood
Confronting her with passionless regard ;
And her rage died within her as she gazed,
For the Love-god subdued her savage will.
Humbly she said, with supplicating look,
Beseeching pardon for her furious word :
" Why scornest thou me, slave, who am a queen,
Unused to bear the scorns of common men ? "

And he replied, being heart-angered still,
" Thou speakest false ! I am no common man,
But nobler in my land than thou in thine,
Though fallen now into abased estate."

And she—" I do believe thee ; for thine eyes
Speak truth. Have thou free liberty of way
Throughout the realm. I will forget my wrath ;
For thou art noble in thy ways and words,
Though yet thou lov'st me not. Only forbear
Without my word to leave the shining shore."

Thus chanced it that, empowered by her will,
Prince Ervar, free of foot, over the land
Wandered at will, restrained not of man.
And he, oft traversing the sandy shore,
Had marked the many fisher barks that lay
Ready for use, moored on the glistening wave.
Therefore a thought came to his soul of flight.
Then watchèd he occasion ; and a day
Came to him, when alone he paced the shore.
At hand a bark, tossed on the briny wave,
Ready for parting ; but the fisher folk,
Save one, were yet afar upon the strand.

Instant Prince Ervar, from a jutting rock,
Sprang, swift of foot, upon the tossing ship.
With one blow of his hand, inured to war,
He struck the sailor senseless. Then he raised
The white sail to the breeze, severed the cord
That bound the vessel, holding her from flight.
And ere her crew, raising loud shouts of rage,
Crowded the rocks, he, far off on the brine,
Rejoicing in his freedom, held his way.

Fair blew the wind ; the light bark sped along ;
Soon the grey rock cliffs of the island realm
Faded from Ervar's sight, nor yet appeared
O'er the horizon glimmering of sails,
Signs of pursuing foes. Therefore more calm,
Knowing himself released from servile chain,
He took thought of the future. First he proved
The sailor, whether he were dead or no,
And found him living. Then he bound his limbs
With cords, making him captive ; and he flung
Upon him the salt wave, waking the life
Once more within his heart. He, when revived,
At first wild staring round, bereft of sense,
Answered not Ervar's questioning ; but soon
His thought grown clear, he spoke, concealing naught.
Then told he of the food within the ship,
And of the way whereby to reach the land,
Not far remote, though now veiled from their eyes.

CANTO XVII.

QUEEN CHAVAH unto Emeth sent a slave,
Faithful, her follower from childhood's days,
Who should speak weighty words into his ears :
"Come thou with speed, thou and thy mighty men.
Lo ! Arvan's royal city is mine own ;
The children of my race—once slaves, now free—
Watch on its walls ; its thousand ponderous gates,
Brass-studded, ribbed with oak, are in their hands.
When Arvan's host, sore weakened by defeat,
Seeketh an entrance, know the eastern swords
Shall bar his way. What need of further aid ?
Arise, and smite unto the earth thy foe,
Thy foe much hated of Queen Chavah's soul.
Emeth ! the gods have given him to thy hands."

These words Queen Chavah sent unto the king.
Then through the far lands journeyed the fleet slave :
And first he went, through many summer days,
Across the peopled plains ruled of the king,
Which owned Arvan's sceptre, being true.
Here had he need of cunning ; for quick eyes
Spied out men's deeds, exploring treachery.
Therefore he, cautious, bridled his quick tongue ;
Putting upon his limbs the varied garb,
Golden and red, of Arvan's messengers,

Who travelled o'er the earth, fleet as the wind,
Bringing new tidings of the distant lands,
That owned his power, unto the monarch's ears.
And when men questioned him concerning aught,
His mission, or departure point, brief words
He answered, ever shunning copious speech,
Saying, "I seek the king. Delay me not;
Else shall ye surely suffer, earning death."
So came he, riding on fleet-footed steeds,
Unto the margin of the forest-lands.
Then, in the king's name, took he provender
For a whole week of days; also a barb
Swifter than wind, which men at his desire
Gave to him; for he showed the token-staff,
With Arvan's sign, ta'en from the royal store
What time Queen Chavah sacked the palace halls.

So through the woods he journeyed, pausing not,
Save for brief hours, to rest the weary steed
Beside the basin of some forest rill
That wound through shady coverts its sweet way,
Margined with green grass, pleasant to man's eyes,
Even a refreshment unto out-worn beasts,
And a soft resting-place to sons of men.
Thus many days through the dim world of woods
He travelled onward, unperceived of foes;
For that the land knew not the race of men,
Save when some lurking hunter in the shade
Prowled, watching for the lives of forest beasts;
Or a wild tribe of wanderers o'er the earth
Passed, homeless as a wave on the wide sea,
That, journeying many days, finds not repose.
So, scatheless, had he traversed a known path

Which, straight as shaft's flight, led to Emeth's realm.
And now, crossing a barren ridge, he marked,
Far o'er the tossing sea of dusky pines,
In the grey distance, fields yellow with corn,
And peopled cities. Then, all dangers past,
He lifted hands to heaven, and praised the gods,
Who by safe ways had brought him o'er the earth
Unto the land desired of his soul.
But even while his hands were lifted up,
An arrow, shot from unseen savage bow,
Pierced through the ruddy foldings of his breast,
Drinking his blood ; and ere with sharpened spur
He goaded the tired beast to flight renewed,
Another arrow from the lurking foe,
Piercing its heart, stretched it upon the plain.
Then, with a loud howl, from their ambushment
Sprang the fierce forest children. When arose
The messenger ; a club, upon his brow
Alighting, struck him senseless to the earth.
So with rough hands they seized him. From his limbs
They stript the varied raiment. Him they left
Motionless, reft of the sweet light of day,
Stretched corpse-like on the bare breast of the earth.
But the dead horse they, hewing limb from limb,
Bore to their camp ; it being unto them
As delicate food, since on the flesh of steeds
They fed well-pleased ; for the gods gave them not
Goats, or well-nourished sheep, or flesh of kine.

Now after that the children of the woods,
Laden with prey of flesh, had disappeared,
Full many hours, stunned by the savage club,
Lay Chavah's slave, unmoving as a stone ;

But when day waned, and the dim, starry night
Came down from heaven, sent of all-gracious Ur,
Bearing sweet dew, and gift of kindly sleep
To the outwearied race of mortal men,
Then life began to flow throughout his veins,
Awaking in him memories of the past.
Slowly he raised from earth his stiffened limbs;
Then through the black wood stealthily crept along,
Through the dark hours, fearing in every glade
Some ambushed foe, quencher of human life.
So wended he his way, till rosy dawn
Chased the night gloom from the de-lighted heavens.
Then to his ears, strained for the slightest sound,
Came the sweet tinklings of a forest spring,
Full of the promise of renewed strength.
It sought he forthwith, and, deep plunged therein,
Healed his worn limbs with its crystal dew,
By the good forest gods given for man's weal;
Then travelled once more onward o'er the plain.

But when he reached King Emeth's land, he showed
Queen Chavah's message, seeking Emeth's face,
For the land's welfare hung upon his word.
Him did the elders of the utmost town,
Whereto he came, clothe in all-comely robes,
And brought him on his way to Emeth's camp.

Now Emeth on that day, triumphing much,
Had chased King Arvan's armies from the plains,
And hastened after them with unsheathed sword.
Then did the slave show to King Emeth's soul
Queen Chavah's message, saying stored words;
"Emeth, great king of men, Queen Chavah saith,
'Come thou with speed, thou, and thy valiant men.

Lo ! Arvan's royal city is mine own.
The children of my race, once slaves, now free,
Watch on its walls. Its thousand ponderous gates,
Brass-studded, ribbed with oak, are in their hands.
When Arvan's host, sore weakened by defeat,
Seeketh an entrance, know, the eastern swords
Shall bar his way. What need of further aid ?
Arise and smite unto the earth thy foe,
Thy foe much hatèd of Queen Chavah's soul ;
For the good gods have given him to thy hands.' "

King Emeth answered, " Say thou to the queen,
Thy blood, Queen Chavah, surely is as mine,
Thy people being kindred to mine own,
Nor thou of alien race to Emeth's sires.
Then be thou comforted within thy heart,
Not fearing Arvan's vengeance. I, the king,
Emeth, lord of the West, have spoken words,
Who seeketh thy life strikes against my breast.
Be thou stronghearted, fearing not, he lies,
Even he whom thou dost greatly loath, he lies
Stricken to death. His armies o'er the plains
Fly scattered from my fierce pursuing sword.
Yet if he 'scape the glaive, returning home,
Rest thou on Emeth's succour. Lo ! he comes,
And valiant men are with him, strong in fight."

Such words to Chavah said Emeth, the king ;
And Lygrul ere the envoy went his way,
Seeking him privately, spake message words.
" Say ye to Chavah, ' The sword did its work ;
And Arvan's power is shattered.' Say thou too,
' Fear not, oh, Chavah ! Lygrul watcheth well.' "

Then went the slave once more upon his way,

Being of Emeth's servants safely housed,
And fed, and guarded. So he journeyed safe
Through the wild forest ways, girt by a band
Of archer-men, who kept afar the tribes,
Savage and fierce, who sought the lives of men.
But, when he reached King Arvan's realm once more,
He sent the guard on their returning path ;
Then came disguised in a mean peasant's garb,
Thus journeying back to Chavah the great queen,
And spake King Emeth's message in her ears.

Meanwhile before the city of the Rha
Lay Arvan's host encamped, hostile of heart,
The while with engin'ry and implement
Of giant force, they sought to overthrow
Her stately battlements, unto the earth,
Flinging the heaven-seeking towers ; yet found no way
Through the strong shelter to the city's heart ;
For that the city's might was very great.
Then raised the Northmen massive towers of wood,
Cloaking them thoroughly with the hides of beasts,
Wet with the liquid treasures of the Rha.
On rolling wheels, hewn of unbrittle oak,
They drave them near the ramparts of the town,
Hoping to win a footing on the wall.
But the quick children of the dusky East,
Secure behind the ramparts, flung strange fire
Clinging, which the wide ocean's storèd drops,
And all the exhaustless rivers might not quench,
On the beam-woven forts. As a wild cat
Fastens upon an unresisting prey,
So to the woodwork clung the eating flame.
Straight rose the blaze to heaven, as from a pyre

Rise the red giants fed on flesh of men.
The warrior guard, caught by the sudden flame,
No leisure found to fly. Some in the towers
Wretchedly perished ; choked with blinding smoke
And eaten by the flame. Some flung themselves
Down headlong, and were crushed by the dread fall.
Still day by day, listening to Irach's voice,
The host renewed the strife, though scant success
Waited upon their efforts. Then there came,
Just as hope spread her white wings for the flight,
And every warrior's heart was sore oppressed
With chill despondency, and courage failed,
A messenger to Arvan, saying words
Exceeding comfortable to his soul :
" Great king, despair thou not of triumph nigh,
Though the Rha walls are strong. Strengthen thy hands,
For thou shalt enter yet the royal town,
Even as a conqueror. Hearken ! thousands live
In this thy city loyal unto thee.
These with sick hearts bow to usurping force,
Having no strength to dash to earth their chains,
Yet will they aid thee to regain thine own,
Their hate being great against the Eastern men,
The slaves who, led of Chavah, hold the walls.
Lo ! now, thy servants, in the silent hours,
When moonless night in her mysterious shade
Involves the earth, arising suddenly,
Will smite the guards who hold the brazen gates,
Hard by the holy temple of the Sun.
Thou, when thou hearest tumults, come with speed,
Then shall the unshut gates receive thy bands."

This Arvan hearing, made him ready men,

The valiant of the host, in separate troops,
Each twice ten thousand, ambushed very close
In secret lurking places. So till night
They tarried, being still. But when loud shouts
Broke on the stillness, signalling advance,
With a loud yell, on the Sun's stately gate
They rushed to triumph, even as vultures speed
Towards a carcase. Open stood the folds,
Brass-studded, ponderous. On the threshold lay
The guards, dead or sore smitten. Arvan's friends
Had kept the pledge ; so was the city won.

Free through the gloom the red swords worked their
will ;

The soldiers, mad with fury, wreaked their rage,
Slaying in wild confusion friend or foe.
Soon fire arose above the city's homes,
Giving new light to slay. Three nights and days
Carnage and flame walked through great Rhaon's streets,
Cumbering her ways with dead, changing her halls
To formless mounds of ashes. Then a pause
Came to the slaughter, and the sword had rest.

So through the streets past loud-voiced herald-men,
Proclaiming Arvan's words, and with bowed heads
The people hearkened to his kingly will :
" King Arvan saith, ' My wrath hath now an end,
Know that I spare the city ; though it sinned,
And hath arisen against me. It is mine.
I spare it ; loving it.' Yet this one thing
Saith the king, Arvan, lord of many lands,
' Bring ye to me my foes, the Eastern men,
Where'er ye find them. Bring them stript and bound,
That I may sate mine anger in their blood.

Also search narrowly the city's homes,
Seeking Queen Chavah. Lo ! a monarch's gifts
Shall fitly recompense who findeth her.' "

Swift through the city's ways the herald-men
Went, with high trumpet-voice and loud acclaim,
Announcing to the people Arvan's will.
And three days through the city went they forth,
Proclaiming unto all the king's command.
Then did men bring to them the Eastern slaves
With chained feet, and hands fast bound with cords ;
Yet had no answer showing them the truth .
Concerning Chavah and her lurking-place ;
Only the Easterns knew where she lay hid,
And these were loyal, even unto death,
Saying no word of truth unto the king.

So Arvan sent the heralds forth again
With proclamation, and with trumpet voice,
Saying : " The Eastern men shall all be slain
If Chavah be not given unto my hands."

Then unto Chavah's ears came the report,
As she lay hidden in a secret place.
Therefore she ceased her mourning, rose from earth,
And went forth boldly in the light of day,
Seeking the soldiers who desired her face.
These, when she met, she spake, concealing nought.
" Seekers of Chavah, to the king return,
Say ye to Arvan, ' Add not blood to blood ;'
Chavah doth give herself unto thy hands."

These words, when she had spoken in their ears,
They bound her wrists behind her shapely back,
And took from off her head the jewelled crown ;
Then brought her to King Arvan, where he sat

Upon his royal couch, dooming swift deaths
Unto the leading rebels ta'en in fight.

Thereon the war-men spake unto the king :
“Great king, lift up thine eyes, behold thy foe
Chavah, the queen, sore hated of thy soul.”

Then Arvan, lifting up his gloomy eyes,
Turned him, and looking on her, saw the face
Of her who had destroyed him. Still all fair,
Spite of defeat, and suffering of heart,
It shone more lustrous than a star of heaven.
Sternly the king spake, for her power once more
Was on him, and he strove against its might,
Conscious of passion that was weakness now.
“Art thou then she that hath sore vexed the realm,
Conspiring craftily against its peace ?
Glad must thy heart be for thy task fulfilled.
What gain is thine, that thou has stilled in death
The lives of women and of suckling babes ?
Or what hast thou achieved, having in flame
Destroyed thy palace-home of olden days ?
Look forth upon the corpses of the slain,
Mountain-like lie they round. Of thine own race
Are they. Thou spakest. They have died for thee.
What gain is thine from shedding of their blood ?”

She answered : “Thou hast spoken. I am she—
Chavah, thy foe. Joy have I in that name.
Pledge is it of a not all wasted life.
Woe truly have I wrought to thee and thine ;
More had I worked, but power thereto hath failed.
Delay not thou thy vengeance. Thou of old
Wert a sore hater, sparing not thy foes.
See ! here I stand before thee weaponless ;

Cast down by the quick malice of my fate ;
Exposed to each ill thing thou may'st devise ;
Yet do I scorn thee, Arvan. In thy store
Of tortures hast thou none greater than this,
That my chief purpose is but half-fulfilled.
This do I bear, and waver not a whit ;
Nor moan in heart ; nor have a thought of tears.
Not so ! in thy great wreck I yet rejoice.
Well have my patient hands wrought out thy doom.
Mine eyes may not behold it. What of that ?
Already is it darkening o'er thy head."

Her the king answered : " Hater of thy lord,
Haply thou errest. Mortal eyes are dim,
Misreading often the decrees of fate.
Since men mistake the longings of their hearts
For the fixed purpose of the immortal gods.
Gaze round thee on the bodies of the slain !
Look on thine own limbs, bound with iron chains !
Then answer, is this like the fever-dream
That thou hast dreamèd, of mine overthrow ?
Of thy sure triumph ? Surely thou art not
So blinded by the frenzy of thy soul ?
But if thou have the will, thou yet can'st see,
Not upon me the anger of the gods
Resteth so greatly, as on thee and thine.
For me the night of ill-success doth wane,
And triumph's morning-sun shines out anew ;
But of thine own work, Chavah, what remains ?
Harm hast thou wrought for me in bygone days ;
How can'st thou injure now ? I, a crowned king,
Yet on my warrior throne do sit secure ;
Thou, a chained captive, waitest for my doom."

Chavah replied : " So be it. I have drunk
The wine of laughter, learning thy defeat.
Such sweet draught must be paid for ; that I know.
Costly were not the payment claimed of fate,
Though mine own life were the absolving price.
But that thine evil days are not o'erpast
That feel I ; for my heart hath shown it me.
Yet if my heart deceive ; and thou anew
Wert earth's triumphant tyrant as of old,
What grief would be to me ? I should have past,
Long ere that hour, into the quiet land,
Where men forget the strivings of this earth.
What have I said ? Hast thou misled my lips
To frame words of a possible success ?
Shall triumph be to such as thou again ?
Be the thought far. King ! thou hast lost the sword ! "

She said. But upon Arvan, instantly,
Fierceness of wrath came down, filling his heart,
Abhorring much her ancient treachery.
Then spake he : " Thou through death shalt not escape
Knowledge of thy defeat, of my success."
So to his men of war he turning, spake :
" I will not bandy words with her," he said.
" Her heart is hardened as the nether rock ;
Nor will she know the greatness of her guilt.
But there are instruments, wherewith to cleave
The unyielding bosom of the basalt stone.
Hence to my dungeons bear her. Let her pine
In the damp chambers, where no ray of light
Shines comforting ; but exhalations foul
Arise, and fret the smoothness from the limbs.
There let her eat the bread of bitterness,
And drink the briny river of her tears."

And Chavah answering, spake to him again :
“ Better the dungeon-cell, where thou art not,
Than the fair palace where thy presence is ;
Since where thou art, alone have I unrest.”

Then Arvan, being angered by her speech,
Cried to his men of war, “ Away with her.
Suffer ye her no more to speak vain words,
Whereby she, being evil, mocks my might.
Hence to the cell where she shall meet her doom.”

He spake. The war-men honouring Arvan's word,
Laid hands upon Queen Chavah where she stood,
And led her from his presence-hall away.

Thus Chavah pined within the dungeon-cell,
Scooped in the rocky bowels of the earth :
The gloomful chambers wherein stored they men,
Whom the king's word had set apart for death.
Narrow and low the cell even as the grave ;
Therein men dwelling might not stand or lie,
But crouched like caged wild beasts in the dark night.
Space therein was there but for one alone.
The jailer, who threw down the scanty crust,
And set the cruse of water, stood without,
Nor stooped his head to pass the narrow door.
No ray of light pierced through the treble gloom ;
Nor window-opening suffered heaven's breath,
Grateful, to pass through, blessing captive brows.
But the black cavern's grim, unshapely mouth,
That greedy swallowed up its captive fare,
What time the door of stone wherewith 'twas barred,
On grating hinge revolving, opened slow,
Gazed but on outer chambers, black with night.

Such was Queen Chavah's chamber ; wherein chained

By hand and foot unto the wall of rock,
She, dwelling many days, wore out her heart
With longing dreams of vengeance unfulfilled.
At times weeks passed, and not a human voice
Spake with her ; nor beheld she face of man.
At times the torturers came, and showed her things,
Words of the former deeds of woe, wrought out
Deep in the rocky bosom of the earth,
That kept it secret, showing not a word.
They told her how the king's foes limb from limb
Were rent at his command. They showed the hooks,
And all the varied engin'ry of death,
Whereby the lives of men were gnawn away,
When the king's word went forth that they should die.
Also they said to her, "This dungeon cell—
Dark, hateful to the soul, Chavah—is one
Of many chambers, all of evil fame ;
For ofttimes men, prisoned through all their years,
Have died therein, seeing no more the day.
And ofttimes, walling up the chamber door
With wall of stone, we leave men, yet alive,
To perish in the cell which is their grave.
Such doom may be thine own. Wherefore, repent,
Suing for mercy ere it be too late ;
For the king's heart may be to pardon yet."

Thus spake the jailers ; for the king's command
Was, "Speak ye even thus unto the queen ;
For I would have her soul subdued to mine :
Since a slight thing it is to crush the life,
While the soul, scorning, doth defy my might."

But whatsoe'er her keepers said to her,
She answered not unto their threatening speech ;

Nor spake again, meeting with scorn their words.
Therefore when, many days, they with much speech
Had communed with her, seeking to subdue
Her soul unto the tenor of her fate,
They, having not prevailed, went their way,
And left her to her loneliness of heart.

Thenceforth, for many months, in the black gloom
Lay Chavah, chained; nor any sought to her.
For, when their words prevailed not o'er her soul,
The jailers said, "She will, in lonely hours,
Repent her of the purpose of her thought.
The rust of idleness will eat away
The iron strength man's might may never bind."

But Chavah lay in the thick, pitiless night,
Wherein no ray looked kindness to the soul,
And hated Arvan with unconquered heart.
For she was strengthened in her spirit's might
To face all tyranny, wherewith her foes
Might, having strength, essay to crush her will.

Yet when the slow hours wore in gloom away,
And no voice spake with her, nor any eyes
Looked human thought, answering again her own,
She wearied for her freedom, as a beast
Caught by the crafty traps of hunting men,
And caged for the pleasure of a king,
Chafes out the hours of its captivity,
Outstretching into empty space its claws,
Dipping them, in its thought, once more in blood,
And yearning for the prey. Its large, dark eyes
Glare hungry, orbèd to their utmost round.
It hath forgotten the restraining bars :
Its soul is toward the chase ; its sleek, fair limbs

Are strained as though, bounding o'er desert sands,
It fiercely strove after a flying hind.

Thus Chavah longed for the free air of day,
Picturing past vengeance, she desired new,
With cravings of the heart unspeakable.
"He lives," she said; "he lives—triumphant lives,
Who hath so sorely wronged me. I am chained;
Powerless to wreak on him desired revenge.
I cannot strike one blow to aid his fall.
Would that my curse could wither up his life;
Then should my words fall scorching on the air,
Filled with the fire of vengeance to destroy.
But where no god, into large, listening ears,
Receives the cryings of extreme distress,
Man's bitterest curse is but an idle thing,
An all-vain utterance of unmeaning sound,
That for an instant stirs the heavy air,
Then, ceasing, is as though it ne'er had been.
Alas! for me, that my unconquered soul
Commandeth but the service of chained hands.
Drop—drop by drop, would I shed forth my blood,
If each drop added but a little weight
To crush the life of Arvan to the earth.
Yet here I rot, powerless as are the dead,
Within the narrow confines of the tomb,
To work unto the living farther ill.
Oh! that my heart, which is so strong to die,
Had strength to work out freedom. Years may come,
And pass away, leaving me prisoned still
In the dank dungeon's pitiless night of gloom;
For Rhaon's walls are strong. Arvan, though maimed,
Hath warrior vigour yet. He may prevail,

And drive the baffled Westmen to their land.
What hope were mine, if such ill-chance befell ?
No hope, no comfort ; for the king's strong clutch
Holds safe his prisoners ; as a fowling man,
Having with swift shaft struck some hapless bird,
And maimed its wing, taking it in his hand,
Securely grasping, keepeth it till death.
If Arvan conquer, I shall ne'er escape,
To breathe free breath in the earth's upper air.
Yet I might die : barred though I be from means
Familiar, the which using, sorrowing men
Quit the warm precincts of the sun-kissed earth,
Yet one sure remedy is still mine own.
Famine may yet befriend me. They may not
With chains and bars keep out Starvation's feet.
She, having made pact with my resolute lips,
Can yet release me. Shall I hear her voice
Offering meet freedom from the woes of earth ?
Is the time come to die ? Not yet—not yet.
Perhaps some tidings of King Arvan's fall,
I keeping hold on life, may glad my heart
Ere I go forth into the outer gloom,
Silent, that girdeth round earth's changing life,
And all its passionate strivings and desires.
"Twere well to suffer much, if this might be :
Attained revenge outweighs a world of ill.
Yea ! I will live till Arvan's life is run.
The grave o'erpast, he will escape my hate,
Which, while I live, shall yet pursue his days,
Even from the cell, as once from the queen's throne."

Thus Chavah said, and nerved herself to bear
The long, sad hours of dull captivity,

Nursing her hatred, left of life's delights.
Even as a mother, when her children all,
Save one, have, by the hands of unprayed death,
Been snatched away, close claspeth to her breast
Her last delight, her own smooth-headed babe,
Her infant, in whose life alone she lives.

CANTO XVIII.

THERE is a flower, much loved of gods and men,
That whitens as with snow the summer earth.
The sun-flower is it called, since the bright god
Fashioned it in his grief in ancient days.

For in the dawn of earth, when the young years,
Dewy with fresh light of their loveliness,
Came from the palace of the glorious gods,
The race of men, rejoicing in their strength,
Bright with unsullied glory, walked the world.
Also their women were even as the foam
On the salt sea for fairness. Then was born,
Of mortal parents, one excelling maid,
Who shone above her fellows, as eve's star
Excels all other shining lights in heaven.
Her did the bright Sun look upon and love,
With a great love, such as immortal gods
Alone conceive within their breasts divine.
Her golden hair trailed over the green earth,
Even as a cloud, fulfilled with sunrise gold,
Trails o'er the grassed slope of a mountain-side.
Hers was the glittering fairness of a flower,
A lily-flower, white as new-fallen snow,
Fresh as heaven's dew, that in the morning light
Lifts its rejoicing head up to the sky,

Glad in its gracefulness. Upon the earth,
Wealthy in loveliness in those far days,
Peopled with stateliest inhabitants,
There breathed no woman beautiful as she.

From their bright thrones in heaven the gods looked
down,

Admiring much her fairness. And they gave,
Delighting in her greatly, many gifts
And precious, honouring her above her race.
So was she wise of heart as she was fair.

All the earth's sons acknowledged her their queen ;
Also the immortals greatly cherished her.

But the Sun loved her with a perfect love,
Seeking her for his own. And many days
He prayed her with sweet words, entreating her.

Yet hearkened she not unto him. Her eyes,
Being of earth, shrank from the exceeding light
Of the god's glorious face ; for mortal orbs
Endure not, being weak, radiance divine.

Also her heart, she being woman-born,
Yearned not unto him with desire of love,
Averse from the embraces of the god.

But he, his passion deepened by her scorn,
Humbled himself with many prayers and tears,
Beseeching favour, and propitious thoughts.

Thus, stooping from his throne, the god became
Servant unto a woman, made of dust.

The immortal gods, also the sons of men,
Considering his abasement, in their hearts
Scorned the great, glorious god ; for he no more
Sitting upon his throne, ordered the year,
Neglectful of his sway. The seasons mourned.

The flowers no longer wakened from their sleep,
When the Spring, giver of new life, drew nigh.
Also the Summer lost its fervid glow ;
Nor did the Autumn wear his golden crown
Of harvest splendour, since the fields of wheat
Ripened not now, unsmiled on of the god.
These things perceiving, the dread god of Death,
The Moon, stretched forth his silver-shining rod,
And smote the maiden with a sudden fate.
Then did the great Sun mourn, seeing her life
Failed in her, neither might he stay its flight ;
Since irreversible the Moon's decrees,
Nor may the sons of men, nor may the gods
Hinder them in their working. He alone,
Who made them, may reverse. She pined and died.
The great Sun wept above her radiant tears,
Such as the immortals weep, from whose bright drops
The rainbow being fashioned, shines in heaven.

When therefore the fresh teardrops from his eyes
Fell flashing, bathing in their gem-like dew
The white flesh of her life-despoiled corpse,
Sudden a change came over it. It grew
Informèd with new life ; for the god's tears
Have quickening power ; and though availing not
To render unto men departed days,
Nor able to extend the bounds defined,
Ne'er to be changèd, of a mortal life ;
Yet do they grant new being, though diverse
Widely, in form and nature, from the old.

Thus melted the fair maiden's frame in earth,
Beneath the mighty god's dissolving tears.
But where it lay, extended on the mead

Distended & lost I constellated towers,
 Gold-centred as the sun, yet round with rays
 Silver, as is the mantle of the Moon,
 Keeping in memory the maiden's tale
 Thence was it named the sun-flower. Whenceso'er
 He travelling through the heaven looks down on earth,
 This flower the sun hath summoned from the sod,
 Willing to keep in memory alien love.—

This was the flower that Mawrawh in past days
 Had shown to Ervar, giving to his heart
 A token sure, whereby he might discern,
 Beholding it, her presence with the lost.
 This flower she, gathering from the Northland fields,
 Was weaving into garlands with her hands,
 That she therewith might fairly beautify
 The doorways of her sicken-curtained tent.
 Also she took thought how she might convey
 The sign to Ervar's eyes, instructing him
 Of aim accomplished, and of Mawrawh near;
 For she, though baffled oft in her attempt,
 In that her sire, wise through the overthrow
 That had befallen him in the wild lands,
 Perceived the foolishness of her desire,
 And granted not her will—prevailed at last.
 Moved by a heart o'erfond, he heard her prayer;
 And though at first he spoke a frequent nay
 Unto her passionately-urged request,
 Yet on an eve, when she renewed her suit,
 Imploring that she, journeying with the host,
 Might see the overthrow of Rhaon's walls,
 He, answering to her, seeming angry words,
 Spoke, being grieved by her persistency :

“ What is this vain desire within thy heart,
That thou dost urge upon me day by day ?
See, thou art foolish as a petted child,
That crieth for ill things, stretching its hand,
Greedily craving its own proper hurt,
Much mourning when denied. It stands apart
With hand to mouth, pouting its ruddy lips,
With sphering tears slow gathering in its eyes.
Shamest thou not, who art a maiden grown,
Lamenting that thou may'st not feast thy gaze
Upon the armèd shock of sworded men ?
What knowest thou of battle, and the field
Red-soiled with frequent deaths ? Nay, rest thou here :
The war-field is no sight for women's eyes.
Saw'st thou but the red hem of Slaughter's robe,
Thy soul would shrink and faint within thy breast,
As his, who, standing in the halls of Death,
First gazes on the pallid phantom form.
Then would'st thou sorrow o'er thy granted prayer,
Me blaming, that I listened to its words.
Then would'st thou wish wind-swiftness to thy feet,
That they might bear thee from the land of war,
Back without pause to thine own peaceful shores,
And the still quiet of thy curtained rooms.”

There she, fearing denial once again,
And hope for ever vanished, since the day
Drew nigh, when Emeth, king of all the West,
Should with his armèd men, ready to strive,
March northward to destroy King Arvan's power,
And level Rhaon's glories with the dust,
Having no power left to entreat her sire,
Fell prostrate, shedding tears, lifting a voice,

Wordless, of dolorous complaint. Her grief
Through her dark eyes looked largely. So a fawn,
Sore wounded, helpless in its captor's hand,
Looks up with anguishful, reproaching eyes,
That half divest him of his will to slay.

Then the king, Emeth, having no hard heart,
Loving her greatly with an unwise love,
That granteth to the loved, desired bane,
Spake yet again: "But wherefore should'st thou go?
Learn that it is no peaceful triumph way,
To which we Westerns march, but full of fears.
Even yet the shielded Northmen, strong in arms,
May with sharp spears compel our swift retreat."

But she, who deemed his speech, once 'stablished
sure,
Showed signs of yielding, lifting her dark eyes,
Looked on him with entreaty, piteously.
"But, howsoever, let me go," she said,
"Perils, that thou must face, I too will share,
Even I thy daughter. See, they shall not say,
She stayed at home, silk-garmented, in peace,
While her sire, warring, faced white-visaged death.
Also my presence with the warrior host
Will hearten greatly men, who are weak of soul,
Will make them strong, seeing that I endure,
A woman, unused to hard toils of war,
Danger and hardship, shrinking not one whit."

Then Emeth said, "Yet pause while there is time.
If there be danger of captivity,
Know, though I love thee, thou shalt yet be slain.
I will not have thee captive to the foe;
For he will mock thee with a cruel scorn,

Being my child. Therefore if vain my war,
And my sword fail, know thou shalt surely die."

She answered, "If it be so ; and the gods
Allot defeat, for triumph ; then 'twere well,
That I should close these eyes weary of light,
Excluding all our sorrow and our shame.
Since, we o'ercome, better it were to die."
"Is such thy thought, oh ! daughter, much beloved ?
Thine be thy heart's desire. Go thou with us,"
Said the great king, "according to thy will,
For thou art worthy, being brave of heart."

These words spake Emeth, in unthinking pride,
Rashly, rejoicing greatly in his child,
Seeing she loved her sire, was strong to die.
Yet swiftly wished he the quick speech unsaid ;
For sage reflection, treading on the heels
Of speech imprudent, showed him, ere the sound
Had ceased reverberating on the ear,
Unwisest his concession. Then he sought
To turn his daughter from her fixed intent
By much persuasion. But her heart was strong ;
Nor would she loose him from his promise word,
Though, with all eloquent lips, on her he urged
The unknown dangers of the warrior's life,
War, and its sudden-born vicissitudes ;
Saying, "Be warned, slight girl, war is a world
Tempestuous, oversurged with thunder storms,
Where the all-sudden lightning strikes to earth ;
Nor may the heart of man forecast for whom
The red death lurketh in the menacing clouds.
But this man now, who seemèd all secure,
It slays ; now striketh that unto the earth,

Who, being vain-glorious, trusted in his strength,
Nor knew the might of the dread god of storms.
Thou too, thou haply dreamest that thy sire,
Having o'ercome King Arvan of the sword,
In the great battle by the yellow stream,
Shall still prevail. Yet, Mawrawh, know thou well,
However bright the day dawn, shining fair,
No man of woman born, can tell the close,
No man nor woman. For earth's eyes are dull,
And many suns go down in storm and gloom,
That rose upon a clear, beautiful heaven,
Untempested with clouds. I, even I,
Triumphant in that earlier field of strife,
Have proved reverse even now. Thyself dost know,
For in that flame beside the Western sea,
Full many perished, dying evil deaths.
They died, though brave, swift smiters with the sword,
For the red fire o'erwhelmed them ; and the gods
Willing to humble men, else overproud,
Suffered destruction, therefore were they slain.
Now then, consider in thy heart, and see.
Some evil chance, as yet all undiscerned
Of the most watchful gaze, in turn may rise.
Then may the Northmen also joy at heart,
While we abased, for triumph know defeat."

But whatsoe'er, King Emeth, speaking words,
Said to fair Mawrawh, he prevailed not
To change the steadfast face of her intent.
But unto all his words she would reply :
" Whate'er befall, yet would I go with thee,
For I would be partaker in thy fate."

So seeing that her heart was set, the king,

He having pledged to her his unstained word,
Suffered it. And she came with the great host,
He being bound by the rash promise given.

Therefore sweet Mawrawh, journeying through strange
ways,

Went with the Western arms through forests dim,
Rocky defiles, unpeopled plains of grass,
And ancient forests, black with many boughs,
To that far land, where o'er the wasted plains,
Frowning the city of the Rha looked down.
Hither when she had come, she took great thought,
Carefully plotting, how she might convey
To Ervar's hand, the chosen signal flower ;
Yet never found plan fitting ; for the task
Was hard for her, she being young in years.
By day the camp was full of prying eyes ;
By night the armed watchers paced their rounds.
Thus every pathway to her will seemed closed,
Wherethrough she might convey her message sign.

Long, she, afflicted, hardly hoped success ;
But the Love-god maketh himself a road
Through hindrances, that seem to mortal eyes
Invincible. Rocks, and the lapse of seas,
Stay not the tread of his immortal feet.
He laugheth at the strong-framed iron grates,
Wherewith the might of kings would bar his way.
Fetters, beneath his touch, are as silk bands
Around a giant's brawny-muscled limbs,
They being snapped asunder instantly.
Nor doth he fail to conquer harder things
Than rock or iron ; for the heart of man,
Not easily subdued, he moulds at will,

Bending it as he lists, like plastic wax,
Heat-softened. He, the great God, spake to her,
Conveying to her heart a prudent thought.
Then did she cast her eyes upon a slave,
A Northman, taken in the earlier war,
Speaking persuading words into his ears:
"Slave! hearken unto me; so shalt thou have
Freedom, also a large reward of gold."
Then, seeing further, that he heard her speech
With ears attent, nor was averse in heart,
"Know'st thou," she said, "Prince Ervar, Irach's son?"
He answered, "Yea! I know him." Then she spake:
"See, I would send to him this message flower.
Thou, giving it into the prince's hands,
Shalt have thine ancient freedom. I have said."

But he replied, "How may this thing be done?
For in the day the attempt were even death;
Also by night the watchers pace around."

Then she, "Oh! doubting-hearted, I will make
A path for thee. Only work thou my will."

So unto Mawrawh hearkenèd the slave;
And she laid plots, favouring his secret flight;
Long vainly, since escape from out the camp
Was harder than she dreamed of. Yet at last
Her wise endeavourings touched upon success.

So, on a day before great Rhaon's gates
The Northman, once enslaved, now free, appeared,
The water pouring from his dripping limbs,
And from his girded garments—for his way
Had been through the dark depths of river waves.
Instant the guard, watching the city wall,
Challenging him, questioned his name and race.

And he, "I am a Northman, and I flee
Even now from out the camp of the great king,
Emeth, who warreth on the Northern land ;
Also I seek Prince Ervar, Irach's son,
With message word, meet only for his ear."

This when the armed men, the guard, had heard,
They took him, as he was, with garments dank
From the chill, moist embraces of the wave,
And led him straightway there where he desired,
Unto Prince Ervar's presence. Ervar stood,
Brown-faced with journeyings over treeless plains,
And the unshaded lapse of briny seas.
Gaunt even yet from many a foodless march
In desert lands, and forests many-leagued,
Black with array of multitudinous trees,
In whose dark world men travelling found not bread,
But upon oak corn, beech mast, and on roots
Sought their uncertain sustenance. Him saw
The messenger at first with unsure eyes—
For greatly was the prince changed from the days,
Sunlit, unvexed of his all-beauteous youth.
Then questioning : " Art thou the prince ? " he asked,
Ervar, Prince Irach's son, in days of old
Fairest of all the thousands of the North ? "

Who answered, " I am he. Shew forth in turn
Thy name and race. Also declare the cause
Of these poor garments, dripping from the wave,
Servile, that are unmeet for warrior limbs ;
Since from thy speech thou scarce should'st be a slave."

Then, stretching forth his hand, he to the prince
Spake swiftly, answering words, " Hearken," he said,
" Prince Ervar, for my lips shall show the truth.

Know I am Irka, son of Gor the strong,
Known was he of the nations of the North
For the great might of his strong-sinewed hand,
Seeing his giant force could break in twain
Bars of black iron, as a common man
Breaketh a splinter small of brittle fir,
His also was the power, with fenceless fist,
To dash, even into powder, pebbled stores
From the grey ocean marge, as a strong arm,
Armed with a hammer, smites them into dust.
I am his son, wearing no fameless name.
In the great battle by the yellow stream
I stood against the army of the West.
Fair victory shone not on the Northern steel.
King Arvan's warrior-men fled from the field ;
But I fell wounded in the play of swords.
Thus was I made a slave. But when the spring
With her warm fingers thawed the Northern snows,
Hither I journeyed an unwilling thrall,
Wearing the chain, serving the Western king.
Me, Mawrawh, daughter of King Emeth, saw,
Then spake all-pleasant words, ' Wilt thou be free ?'
But I replied, ' And how should I escape ?'
Watch not the watchers round King Emeth's camp ?'
She answered, ' Work my bidding ; for the path
Lies open. Only must thy heart be brave.'
Thereon she gave to me a certain flower,
Saying, ' When thou hast 'scaped from out the host,
Bear this unto Prince Ervar, Irach's son.'
Then, I consenting, after certain days
She brought me in her train, at eventide,
Nigh to the river bank that I might flee,

Escaping by the swimming of my hands.
So when the eve grew dim upon the earth,
Deep plunged into the river's breast of waves,
I fled to Rhaon, and was free once more.
Such, Ervar, is the story of my flight.
Here hast thou, witness of my truth, the flower."

Then into Ervar's hand he gave the bloom,
The sun-flower plucked of Mawrawh's tender hands.

As when men, tossed upon a world of waves,
Wait for the rising of a certain star,
Their guide, night after night, across the deep,
Long time they wait, anxious, with silent tongues,
Its bright appearing. Last some gazing eye,
Quicker than other watchers', notes the flame.
Far o'er the changeful crest of some dusk wave
It shineth, shedding down all gracious light,
Helpful to seamen. So he cries aloud,
Rejoiced in heart by the propitious sight,
While all his face is mantled with a smile.

Such change came over Ervar's countenance
Perceiving Mawrawh's token flower, the sign
Of her sweet presence in the hostile camp.
Then unto Irka spake he, "Knowest thou
Her tent, who gave into thy hands the flower,
Also the pathway through King Emeth's host
Whereby my feet may near it?" "Yea," he said,
"I know it, having oft-times traversed it."

"Couldst thou trace the road in starless night,
(For the clear day consorts not with the attempt)
Threading thy way, of wakeful eyes unseen?"

And Irka straight replied, "Hard the attempt,
Since Emeth's warriors are no drowsy-heads,

Nodding with sleep. They pace their nightly rounds,
Armèd, with war-spears in their ready hands.
Shall they not thrust us through, if that we fail ? ”

But Ervar answered him, “ Be not dismayed ;
Nor fear thou failure ; for the shades of night,
Being with us, shall be found a sure defence.”

Then he replied, “ Not wholly trust the gloom.
Their watchers, prowling upon darkened ways,
Are even as cats, whose eyes pierce through the dark.
Arduous the enterprise, and dangerous
To penetrate the heart of Emeth’s host,
Even though veiled in much-concealing night.
Therefore be warned, refraining from thy thought.
Why should’st thou, over-rash, destroy thy life ? ”

And the prince answered, scorning counsel words,
“ Waste not vain breath in unregarded speech ;
Thy voice is as the babbling of a brook
Unto a hunter’s unobserving ears,
When he pursueth, eager for a prey.
Know, I will do this deed, even though I die ;
For that my soul constrains me, being brave.
If thou wilt guide me, well ! If thou refuse,
Untutored will I tread the path alone.
Then wilt thou be self-stripped of great reward.”

Thus spake Prince Ervar, being very wroth,
Disdaining greatly fear of pain and death.

Now Irka, son of Gor, when that he heard
Mention of recompence, with altered will
Beheld the enterprise : for that his heart
Was covetous of gold exceedingly,
He being hungry for it ; as a wolf,
Starved in the black depths of a foodless wood,

Sees, and is hungered for, a child's fair flesh.
Nor, though he loved not danger for itself,
Being undesirous of high deeds in war,
And of the fame that brave men win thereby,
Shrank he aside from death-environed paths,
If once thereon his famished eyes beheld
The yellow gleam of heart-rejoicing gold.

Then to the prince he spake, with changèd voice,
"But if I do this thing at thy desire,
Say on : what shall be mine, for my reward ? "

And he—"A thousand squares of beaten gold :
These shall be thine, if thou wilt guide my feet
Through the thronged camp to Mawrawh's royal tent."

And he—"So be it, I will teach thy feet,
Thou suffering me to choose the mode and hour."

Then Ervar answered, "These things be thy care.
For me, I wreck not of the allotted path,
If it but bring me surely to my aim.
Now then speak truly, showing me thy thought.
When, by what path shall we pierce through the host.
Vast as a sea it is, with multitudes
Of snowy tents, for shining crests of waves.
Amid the spirit-wildering array,
How shalt thou find an undeceiving path,
Leading us, not discerned of watching men,
To Mawrawh's silken-curtained resting-place ? "

And Irka, making answer, oped his lips,
Replying—"Hearken ! I will show the truth,
Revealing to thy soul concealèd things,
Wherethrough we, having knowledge, may prevail.
Thus and thus it is. Yet are twenty days,
Then shall the great king keep his day of birth,

Even Emeth, lord of many lands and men.
Then shall be mighty feastings ; for the West
Severs that day from all the year's fair sons,
By an exceeding fulness of delight.
Then shall the Moon look down upon the men.
Eating much flesh, drinking the purple wine,
Till they forget the cares of mortal life,
Full to the lips, steepèd in heavy sleep.
Let us on this same night, we being wise,
Steal cautious forth on our adventurous way,
Noiseless as serpents gliding over sand.
Shall they perceive us ? Drunken with much wine,
They will be strewed over the groaning ground,
Like sheaves, that, drenched by the abounding rain,
Lie tempest-smitten, covering the earth.
Then will I bring thee surely to the tent,
Even Mawrawh's, which thou seekest ; for my feet,
Acquainted with the camp through many weeks,
Can trace its pathways, erring not at all."

And Ervar—" Surely some o'erwakeful man,
Watching, will mark us as we go our way.
Will he not warn his comrades, rousing them
With eager shout ? So shall our hopes be crossed ;
We captured also, or despoiled of life ;
For our two swords avail not in the war,
Matched all unequally against a host.
Think further, for thy scheme is all unsure,
Depending wholly upon wine-sealed lids.
Were it not well in alien garb and arms
To shun chance observation of quick eyes."

And Irka spake to him, replying straight :
" Had we the arms and garb of Emeth's guard,

It might protect us—for men reverence,
Delaying not, its wearers.” Ervar said :
“ Thus shall it be ; we will let fashion garbs,
Also the armour worn of Emeth’s guard,
Then on the night appointed seek the camp.”

Thus they two made a compact, ’stablished sure,
That they would prove the adventure, being brave ;
This, much desiring love, the other gold.
And on the night of Irka named, the night
Kept of the West, remembering Emeth’s birth,
They past the city walls with silent feet,
And sought the peopled leagues of Emeth’s camp.

Through the long tent-lined avenues, in the gloom,
Where drunken men lay thick, secure they past,
Few men beholding ; and the watchers’ eyes,
Being blinded by the garb, and shining crest,
Worn of the guard, who shielded Emeth’s life
With hedge of valiant bodies prompt to die.
At last they came, through devious winding ways,
To where King Emeth’s flag, above his tent,
Hung heavy in the night air ; slumberful,
As were the sleep-sealed eyes resting beneath.
Then Irka pointed to a lesser tent,
That stood anear, its portals hung with wreaths
Of the fair flower, loved of the shining sun,
Saying, in whispered tones, unto the prince :
“ Behold thou Mawrawh’s tent ; loosed is my word.”

So Ervar, lifting up the silken folds
Which screened fair Mawrawh’s sleep from prying eyes,
As a rosed flower, whose leaves are folded close,
Hides a bright insect from the dews of eve,
Gazed upon Mawrawh’s slumber. For the space

Of twenty heart-beats he regarded her,
He being fettered by her silent grace,
And visage marvellously beautiful,
Dumbly, not stirring or in hand or foot ;
Then, stooping forward, on her lips he laid,
Suppressing every scream, his strong right hand,
While with the left he prisoned her twin wrists,
Firmly, as they were fettered with steel chains,
Also he whispered gently in her ear,
“Awake, oh! Mawrawh, I thy love, am here.”

She woke, she raised her eyes with a great stare
Of pain and terror. For an instant wide
Glared the great orbs of sight upon his face.
Then sudden dawned remembrance. To her brow
Mounted the red flush, witnessing of shame.
She knew him well ; burned black with torrid suns,
His face grown lean with hunger and distress,
Masked in disguising robes, changed beyond thought,
Yet did she know him, being taught of love.

Therefore he from her mouth lifted his hands,
Taught by the love-light in her raptured eyes,
Perceiving knowledge present in her soul.
And she, speech being rendered to her lips,
Opening her mouth, questioned, “How cam’st thou
here?

Ervar, belovèd, flee thou, instant flee.
A million swords are whetted ’gainst thy life.
See, they will slay thee, for my sire is wroth,
Forgiving not thy flight. How should I live
If thou dost perish ? Can I now provide
Second escape ? Re-taken, they will chain
Thy feet, holding thee sure. Away, away,

Tarry thou not for speech. Re-tread the path,
While for thy safety I entreat the gods."

Half from her couch she rose, propt on her hand,
In her great eagerness. Her pleading lips
Were close upon his face. She, in her fear,
Looked fairer unto him ten thousand times
Than when at peace, seeing she feared for him ;
So her deep terror spoke to him of love,

He smiled at her alarms and words of fear,
Thus, thus in mortal peril could he smile !
Yea ! men in those far days had valiant hearts ;
Neither were they dismayed at thought of death.
"Peace," said he, "be not anxious for my life.
Learn that thy drunken guards, heavy with wine,
Watch not around, their eyes are slumber-sealed.
The feast, thou knowest, is for many days,
Wherein men drink them drunk, refraining not ;
Since it is meet to honour thus the king.
Now am I come to bear thee hence away
Unto my father's city. I have trod
The pathway of the camp. Retreat is sure,
For the night air is dark, and none regard.
Throughout the camp men wander now at will,
They and their concubines, rejoicing much,
Such shall both thou and I seem in their eyes ;
Therefore fear nothing, but prepare thy robe,
Revesturing thy limbs for instant flight.
Meanwhile I will attempt the royal tent,
Seeking the sword. Thou, show thou to my mind
The way whereby I may attain the prize."

She said, "I will not show it—for the thing
Thou askest is not good. The sword is ours.

Would'st thou regain it to destroy my sire ?
Not so ! I will not aid thee in thy toil."
"Then will I pass unaided on my way,"
He answered, "found the sword, I will return.
Yet, for thou art but woman, and thy will
Weak as a rush that sways with every wind,
Urge I thee yet once more. Aid thou my will,
Showing the path unto thy father's tent,
Also whereby I may achieve the sword ;
Since these things are to thee full surely known,
And may be taught in prudent word and speech.
Am I not then thy love, dearer to thee
Than are an hundred sires ? Reveal the truth,
For my soul longeth greatly for the sword."

And she in a fierce whisper, "Shall I give
The children of my nation to the death ?
Ervar, my life is thine to work thy will.
Nor will I hold back aught from thy desire,
Loving thee with the whole strength of my heart ;
Yet will I not betray. How should I work,
Even for the sake of thy beloved face,
Such evil deed ? How then should I live on,
Knowing that through my fault brave men had died—
Men through whose veins flowed blood akin to mine ?
Surely the curses of their children's tongues
Would echo all night long within mine ears.
Nay, Ervar, thou hast asked an evil thing.
Listen ! my life I yield unto thy will.
But in this thing know that thou art denied."

And he, "How can'st thou stay my strong resolve,
Since I have purposed to achieve the gain ?"

She answered, "I will rouse the sleeping guards

By loudly clamouring cries. They shall impede
The pathway of thy feet. So shalt thou fail."

Then Ervar, "But, thus doing, thou wilt give
Me to the slaughter, whom thou lovest much,
If thou art yet unchanged from days of old."

And Mawrawh said, "Know that I love thee well ;
In thy life live, in thy death surely die ;
Yet will I give thee over to the sword,
If, hardening thy soul, thou, through my love,
Aimest the death-blow at my people's heart.
What ! is it not enough that I resign
All fame for thee ; henceforth in all men's lips
To live linked with all base dishonouring words !
Shall good men of my race in the West land,
Throughout all after years, telling my tale,
Teach their young daughters standing by their side,
Saying to them, ' Be not as Mawrawh was ;'
But must I also soil my inmost soul
By treachery, such as the judging gods
Forgive not ? But this thing is far from me.
Seeing I hate it greatly in my heart."

Then Ervar, "If thou wilt not hear my voice,
Nor hearken to the pleading of my words,
Arise, for we will straightway go our way."

Then he went forth. And she arrayed her limbs,
Joining him speedily, where in the gloom
He waited nigh the tent. And they two went
Companioned by wise Irka, son of Gor ;
Till, far beyond the confines of the camp,
They came to where Prince Ervar's soldiers stood,
All stalwart men, swift smiters with the sword.

Then said he to them, "Hold this woman sure ;

Not injuring her by word, nor yet in deed—
For that she is a princess, and our friend.
For me I go my way unto the camp ;
For I must win the sword on this same night."

Then turned he to Mawrawh, where she stood,
And said, "Oh ! Mawrawh, wilt thou hinder me ?"

And she, "I may not now impede thy will.
Thou hast betrayed me into impotence,
Having through treachery won unfitting power.
Yet if thou doest this thing, regarding not
My words and supplications of my voice,
Know thou, Prince Ervar, thou hast lost my love."

And he replying, answered her again,
"Who for the love of woman wrongs his land,
Him good men scorn. The gods with evil eyes
Gaze on him ; nor shall he attain renown,
Seeing his thoughts are base within his breast."

Then on his way, despising Mawrawh's prayer,
He went with swift steps through the murky
night,

Regardless though he tore her life in twain.
Careless as he who, through a world of wood
Passing, in two rendeth a smooth fair leaf,
Nor doth regard the wrong. Grow not its peers
Around, in undistinguishable crowds,
Thousands on thousands, making green the earth ?
What matters then the loss of one slight thing
In presence of such full abounding life ?
So thinketh he, and heedless goes his way,
Nor deigns one thought hereafter through his
days
Unto the ravage which his hands have made.

But the leaf bears thenceforth an injured life,
Till autumn serely walking through the world,
It loses hold on the life-giving bough,
And sinketh down, a dry, unhonoured wreck,
Ceasing from out the world of living things.

CANTO XIX.

KING ARVAN sat in Irach's palace hall,
For his own royal home lay desolate,
Since Chavah's hands had burnèd it with fire.
From where he lay, chained on his silken couch,
'Through weakness of his limbs, and drain of blood,
Wound-fever also, eater up of strength,
He could perceive the walls ghastly and bare,
Bare as an ancient death-cleaned skeleton ;
Save where the smoke-burst through some window gap,
Passing had blackened all the nearer stones,
Leaving on them dun shadows as of night.
Steep in the clear air, black against the sky,
Showed the charred rafters of the palace roof.
Never again might shouts of revelry
Ring loud beneath, chasing the calm of eve.
The torch of feasting with its torrid glare,
Would glance from them no more. War-wearied men
Beneath them ne'er again should find repose ;
But the chill snows of winter would recline
White on their blackened strength ; or falling thence,
Soak into mud upon the marble floor,
Oft stained with wine of banqueting, where men
Sat eating largely of the flesh of stags,
Of oxen also, and wool-wearing sheep,

After the hours of nightfall, till the dawn.
Emptied for evermore of human life
Was the great palace, home of Arvan's pride.
It was as is a nest, by truant hands
Laid waste, and flung in fragments on the ground,
Orphaned of all its plumed inhabitants.
And Arvan's eyes dwelt on those ruined walls,
Repeopling all the void with ancient joys,
Called from their home in the departed days.
They came in crowds, as at the mighty word
Of some black priest, friend of the under-gods,
Who from them, through long fasts, and unseen prayer,
Agreeable to their will, hath won strange sway
Over the spectre world, white spirits come,
Souls of the men, who, flesh-robed walked the earth,
Rejoicing in the light of buried years.
In troops they come, obedient to his will,
Featured as formerly, yet not the same,
For the life-joy that once burned in their eyes
Hath past away. Dull are they as a hearth,
When the bright fire dies down in ashes grey,
And lieth hidden from the eyes of men.
They speak :—the hollow image of their voice
Falls passionless from their unmoving tongues ;
Also the fulness of their muscled strength
Hath past away from them, and left behind
Only an empty shadow framed of clouds.

Thus showed to Arvan's heart the lost delights
And glories of his former palace home.
Therefore, thus, brooding on them, hour by hour,
His breast swelled with an agony of grief,
Even as a man's who fetcheth a deep breath ;

He being pained by his remembered bliss,
Beyond endurance of his present days.

Then cried he with a loud voice on the slave,
Who watched without the door for his command.
But when he entering stood, King Arvan said—
“Who tarrieth without waiting my will?”

And he replied, “The priest of the bright Sun,
Sidroc, doth wait, honouring thy glorious word.”

Then Arvan, “Let him stand before the king.”

So Sidroc, entering, stood. Then spake his lord,
Arvan, of many nations, warrior-king,
“Sidroc, high priest of the all-holy Sun,
My heart is sad by reason of defeat,
And these base days I lead, apart from strife,
Therefore I sent to thee swift messengers,
For I would commune with thy soul a space,
Thy soul that is all wise, taught of the gods.
Hearken! what meant the god, using me thus?
Have I not served him with a constant love,
Giving him gold and garments, fair-haired slaves,
Horses of price, also much blood of men?
Wherefore, with utterance of favouring words,
Sent he me forth unto the Western war,
The war that only led to loss and wounds?”

And Sidroc answered, “It is not for thee,
Oh, king! though great in arms, and lord of lands,
To question the high wisdom of the gods.
For often mortals, being dull of sight,
Misread the purpose of the heavenly ones,
Who through ways all diverse from thoughts of earth,
Lead a man onward to his destined end.
Seest thou how the herdsman drives his herd,

By winding paths bringing the hornèd tribe ?
Not straight unto the stream, but deviously
He guides them, having knowledge of the way,
Shunning the precipice, and black morass,
Unto the safe ford ; for his heart is wise.
But the slow beasts, having unthinking brains,
Perceive not, nor have knowledge of his aim.
Yet if they had part-wisdom, and could read
The road unstraight, but not discern the cause,
They might misjudge him, who yet guideth right.
Thus is it also with the sons of men ;
For the wise gods bring them by secret ways,
Known but of them, unto the unseen land,
In such wise as that they fulfil their will,
There coming, where it is their aim to guide.
And for the message-word sent of the Sun,
Oracular, which urged thee to the war,
Promising high reward for warrior toil ;
Say art thou sure that thou with hasty heart
Didst wholly fathom all his thoughts divine ?
Spake he not thus ?—‘ Let Arvan, king of men,
Go forth. The Sun’s eyes look upon his path.
Surely it leads his feet whither I will.’
And once again, when thou, the second time,
Asked’st wise counsel of the Shining One,
Spake he not words ? ‘ If Arvan seek the war,
Then shall the sword o’erthrow a mighty king.’
These words, oh, earth’s king ! are they not fulfilled,
Having attained accomplishment. The Sun
Shone on thy path. He knew thine every step,
Nor didst thou pass the limits of his sway,
He suffering thee to go but where he would.

Also, for Lygrul's hands secured the glaive,
Thus much is sure, giving it to thy foe,
Wast thou not overthrown by Arvan's sword
Being a mighty king? The Sun spake truth,
Though our dull eyes, veiled with the fogs of earth,
Discerned not his intent." Then Arvan said—
"If these things be so; even yet to me
Scant comfort is, knowing them wholly true;
For the god suffered me to seek the war,
Whence ruin rose unto my warrior fame,
Also destruction to mine ancient realm."

Then Sidroc answered, "Judge not from the hour,
That little fragment of far-reaching life,
Which soon gives place unto a changed time,
What the whole tenor of thy life shall prove.
For oftentimes brave men suffer defeat,
And fame effaced, who yet, in after days,
Arise all-glorious from the transient gloom."

Here Sidroc paused, then marking that the Sun
Rose slowly, shining, from the orient wave,
After his rest new-beaming on the earth—
"Seest thou, how the great Sun rises red,
Toiling," he said, "up the steep slope of heaven,
Through creeping fogs that hide his glorious form.
The day wears on; and he looks down on men
From the clear summit of the arch of blue,
Fulfilled with splendour. Lastly cometh eve,
Dusk-travelling through the sky, giver of rest.
Then the great One, girt round with ruddy gloom,
Veiling his glory from the eyes of men,
Passeth in silence to the shadow-land.
Such life as he, the glorious god, doth know,

Such life, oh, Arvan ! he to thee vouchsafes ;
For that thou art his friend ; he loves thee well.
Therefore he fashioneth thine earthly life,
Giving it shape and colour like to his.
These things consider well within thy heart,
Pondering upon them with a prudent mind.
Then say, hast thou a fitting cause for grief,
Thou having lived a life like to a god's."

Then Arvan—"Life, that doth befit a god,
Is but ill suited to a mortal man ;
Whose days are few, whose heart is also flesh,
And whose short being rounds itself with gloom.
See ! yon bright sun, that overcome at eve,
And wearied with his toilings, girt with night,
Sinks down to his low couch beneath the world,
Doth on the morrow's morn more glorious rise,
Freshened through briefest rest for life renewed.
But unto me what second morning dawns ;
For unto man but one life is on earth.
This taken, there remaineth unto him,
Being no god, nor linked to life divine,
But the unbroken void of empty hours,
Loathed of my soul. Such being as brave men
Studious of better things, abhor on earth.
Wherein war is not, nor desire of fame,
Nor love of women, nor the feast of wine,
Nor any presence of familiar things.
Such thought afflicts my soul, that fears not death,
But the dull torpor of a hated calm,
Emptied of all delights that I have loved."

Then Sidroc speaking, answered him again,
"Thou errest, Arvan. Unto common men,

Such end doth come after the close of life ;
They being fitly mated with their deeds.
But what hast thou in common with base herds
Whose bodies, being dirt, well blend with clay.
Thou art an earth-god, whose bright path in life
Is shone around with glory. All diverse
Thy fate, here and hereafter, from their doom.
Warrior ! the gods' hands fashion thy reward.
Not downward to the dull haunts of the dead
Thy pathway tends ; but to the realms above,
Where brave men feast at tables of the gods."

And he—"Such hope was mine in days of old.
But weaker hours are with me ; and a doubt
Is on my soul, whether the gods for me
Reserve this thing. Seeing I linger here
Strengthless, unable to contend in war,
Where brave men strive. What if I pine away,
Like a sick ox that dies on couch of straw,
Nor perish by the foe's desired steel."

Then Sidroc—"Have thou peace. Whether thou fall
By foeman's steel, on the red battle-plain ;
Or sickness, born of wounds, eats out thy life
By gradual wearing of unblest decay ;
Know that thine after-life remaineth sure,
Established by the strong word of the Sun,
Beyond all chance or change. Have I not heard ?
Have I not seen ? Yea, even these eyes beheld
Sight unperceived by other eyes of earth—
Awful, scarcely to be endured of men,
Who, being weak, may not support the blaze
And aspect near of the unveiled god.
Yet unto me, his servant, he hath given,

I being exercised by frequent fast,
And hardened through devotions long sustained,
Standing full often in his temple courts,
Lost in an ecstasy of speechless praise,
From dewy nightfall till the ruddy Dawn,
Orient, arises, making glad the earth,
Strength to support his glory, and to hear
The close roll of that voice whose dreadful tones
Are as the crash of thunder, echoing wide
Over the cloudy firmament of heaven.
Thence is it that, in visions of the dark,
When slumber seals the eyes of mortal men,
Joy-wearied, or oppressed with many cares,
The great god, even the Sun, came down to me,
Shining upon my slumber-curtained eyes.
Startled from out the realm of placid sleep
By the exceeding glory of that light,
Sudden I op'd my dull, sleep-drunken eyes.
The great god stood beside me, glorious
As when he walks the blue fields of the sky,
Shedding much light upon the sons of earth.
From off each polished limb the glory streamed ;
Centred he was in a great orb of light,
Himself yet brighter than th' effulgent glow
Which girt him round, even as a torch's light
Is dim matched with the red heart of its flame.
Voiceless I listened for his will divine ;
For a great awe lay heavy on my heart ;
Since even of articulate-speaking men
The strongest is as water in his sight.
Then from his lips celestial came these words :
“ Sidroc, high priest of the most holy Sun,

Hearken with ears attent. Arvan the king
Mourneth, and is disquieted at heart,
Deeming his war-work done, the while his life
Is yet whole in him. Rise, seek out the king;
Say unto him: 'Thus saith the reverend Sun,
Lord of the world, who ruleth the green earth,
Also the uttermost fields of the wide heaven,
Is it for nothing thou hast served the Sun,
Building a temple, worthy of all praise,
To be desired above all earthly shrines;
Offering great gifts and fair, such as the gods
Accept, well pleased, from the sons of men—
Red gold and gems, bodies of fatted beasts,
Wine, and the ruddy blood of captive men?
Therefore be strong, establishing thy heart.
Fear not; for I will send to thee a death,
Worthiest of all deaths died of mortal men.
Then shalt thou live before me. The just gods,
Weighing thy warrior toil with prudent care,
Have found thee worthy. Therefore have their hands
Prepared for thee above the golden helm,
Pine-crowned, which warriors at the feasts of gods
Wear, being honoured. Have thou rest of soul:
Waxest thou not through earth's life to a god?'
Such words the bright Sun spake unto mine ears,
Then passed from my sight. King, I have said."

Then the slave, entering, spake to Arvan words:
"Irach, Prince of the nations, Sword of War,
Seeketh thy face, having great need of speech;
For that he hath a new thing to unfold,
Whereof thou should'st have knowledge instantly."

And Arvan answered, saying to the slave,

“Speak to Prince Irach, that he enter in,
And look upon my face.” Thereon went forth
The slave, and spake in Irach’s ears the words;
Who, entering straightway, stood before the king.
But Sidroc, the high priest, arose and went.

Then Arvan to the leader of his hosts
Spake friendly words: “Irach, first sword in war,
Thou comest here desired. Lo! I have sought
Counsel in days from others, yet from thee,
Prudent of heart, seek I not aid in vain.
Thou hast not e’er deceived me with false hopes,
Feigning beguiling speech to soothe mine ear;
But tellest truths even as becometh man.
Say on, then. What new word bringest thou here
With speed unto mine ears? Hide naught from me,
Whether the word be sweet, or undesired.”

Then Irach spake: “Great king, I bring the word;
Yet of its nature know the gods alone,
Whether it bode to thee or ill or good.
In the still hours, when earth is veiled in shade,
For the black night yet held untroubled sway,
Nor at the bidding of the clear-faced Dawn
Laid down her ebon sceptre of command,
An armed man stood at my palace gate,
Desiring speech; for that he brought a word
Behoveful to be known. But when I came
And looked on him, he showed his speedy tale.
“Prince Irach, lord of all the northern hosts,
Hearken. Prince Ervar saith, ‘Have I not gone
To seek the sword, even in Emeth’s tent?
Now will I bring the weapon in my hand,
If from the venture I return with life;

But if I fall, avenge me.' When I heard
Words such as these, I sought the city gate
Wherethrough had Ervar passed, seeking the sword.
There found I certain of his armed men
Watching a captive maiden left in ward—
Mawrawh, King Emeth's daughter, a fair spoil,
Captured by Ervar in the hostile camp;
Who wept, but answered not my questioning,
Seeing her lips are sealed to northern speech.
But when, though tarrying long for his return,
Prince Ervar came not, then sought I thy face,
He being doubtless captured in the attempt."

And Arvan answered to him, "Go thou forth;
Let Arki, chief of heralds, on his feet
Place silver sandals; in his reverend hand
Taking the willow-wand of embassy.
Then let him seek out Emeth in his camp,
And stand before him, speaking warning words:
'Arvan, king of the Northmen, saith to thee,
Dwells not Prince Ervar captive in thy tents?
Now, then, release him straightway at my word.
Know that thy daughter's life is in my hands:
Surely her blood shall answer for his blood.
Thou, therefore, spare him, seeing this is best.'"

Then Irach spake: "The word is wholly wise,
Arvan, oh! king of men! This will I do,
For that the wise gods gave to thee the thought,
Placing it in thy heart." Thereon he turned,
Intent upon his will, going his way.
But when he gained the curtain-veilèd door,
Drawing the folds aside, he pausing stood;
For Ervar was before him. In his hand,

Prize of the attempt, he bore the charmed sword.
An instant stood they twain, mute with great joy,
Considering each his fellow. Then their hearts
O'erflowed with much rejoicing ; and the men
Were bowed against each other, as two sheaves
Of yellow corn, beneath the autumn sun,
Stand, leaning their broad shoulders, each on each,
Propt by the toiling hands of labouring men.

Then Irach, lifting up a great voice, cried,
Declaring unto Arvan Ervar's deed.

"King of the North, lo ! Ervar hath returned,
And in his hands he bringeth thee the sword."

He answered : "Bring him in before my face.
Let him show forth his act, delaying not ;
For that my soul, rejoiced in warrior toil,
Hearkeneth with gladness unto venturous deeds."

Then Irach set his son before the king,
Who spake, commending him : "Show forth thy work,
Most worthy to be spoken in mine ears."

And Ervar spake, obedient to his word,
Saying unto him : "Arvan, king of men,
Hearken. In days of my captivity,
After the great strife by the southern stream,
When, being wounded of the Western men,
I lost my sword and freedom of my hands,
Mawrawh, King Emeth's daughter, looked on me,
Desiring me ; also I loved her much,
She being fairer than a dewy dawn.
But Emeth, being in his heart displeased,
Through that great overthrow by the wide wave,
Mightiest of waters river-fed on earth ;
For the fire ate up all his valiant men ;

Purposed to slay me. Then she loosed my chain ;
And I escaped, coming to mine own land.
This knowest thou ; for that the tale is dry
As long-baked bread, by reason of great age.
Now show I other things. Mawrawh, the Fair,
Sent to me, even of late, a message sign,
Revealer of her presence with the host.
Then I arose, and, guided of a man,
Past yesternight throughout King Emeth's camp,
Seeing his men had drunk them drunk with wine,
Even as was meet upon his day of birth.
Thus came I unperceived to Mawrawh's tent,
And communed with her, showing her my mind,
And that my hands would steal the magic sword.
Which thing she suffered not, threatening alarm,
Wherefrom unblest discovery should arise,
Thwarting my aim. Then I, being constrained,
Took her, even Emeth's child, and through the camp
I brought her to the gateway of the town,
So leaving her in ward till I returned.
Thereafter once again sought I the camp,
Even Emeth's ; and through many devious ways,
Led of the messenger, an erewhile slave,
A Northman, who yet loves his land of birth,
Willing to profit her, even through life lost,
If fitly paid with recompense of gold—
I came to Emeth's tent. Then secretly
Lifting the silken curtain, gold enwrought,
With prudent care, I, writhing like a worm,
Noiselessly slid in by Emeth's couch.
There saw I my desire ; for the great lamp,
Silver, full fed with fat, upon the sheath

And on the hilt shed out clear shining rays,
Revealer of its splendour. I drew nigh,
And stretched my hand toward the magic glaive,
Gazing the while on Emeth's face of sleep,
Fearing awakening, marrer of my toil.
But as I looked on him, a giant hate,
Remembering wrongs that he had done my land,
Filled all my soul with a great flame of fire.
So from my side I drew the shining steel,
And twice I raised my hand, meaning to smite,
Yet was restrained through thought of Mawrawh's love.
Then said I, communing within my heart,
'I may not slay him, though he wronged my lord,
For he is sire to Mawrawh, whom I love ;
Yet will I surely spoil him of the sword,
For this is meet, seeing it is our own.
This therefore did I ; and I went my way,
Being all unperceived, for the king's guard
Were drunken, watching not. Also the king
Had feasted full, and slept a wine-fed sleep.
But when I reached the gateway of the town,
I came to Mawrawh, even where she stood,
And spake to her full briefly : ' Mawrawh, turn ;
Consider : in my hand I bear the sword.
Wilt thou go with me yet ? ' And she replied :
' I will not go with thee ; for thou hast wronged,
Through my heart's love, the children of my race,
Trampling upon my spirit in thy pride.
How should I go with thee ? The very stones
Of Rhaon's walls would cry against my shame,
Went I with thee who hast wrought out this wrong.'
I answered : ' If thou wilt not go with me,

What shall be done to thee ? Wilt thou depart,
Seeking once more the children of thy land ?
She said : ' I will depart. My heart is dead,
Desiring not thy presence any more,
For thou hast slain it by thy treacherous deed.
Henceforward will I ne'er trust man again,
Nor look on him with faith, nor heed smooth words,
That promise false things to deceive the soul.'
Then seeing that her heart had turned from me,
I, to the warrior men who stood around,
Spake, saying : ' Suffer her, that she depart.'
So she went forth, returning on her ways,
Seeking once more the children of her race ;
But I came hither, bringing thee the sword."

While thus Prince Ervar spake, King Arvan's eyes
Dwelt with an eager gaze upon the glaive ;
For his heart longed to hold the shining hilt
In his right hand once more ; as when a man
Meets with an ancient comrade tried in war,
He yearneth with desire to clasp his hand.
Yet he refrained himself ; for kings are not
As common men, who show unveiled hearts
Unto the careless gaze of curious eyes ;
But deepest silence and most strong restraint
Fitly augment the awful majesty
That girds them with divinest splendour round.
Nor could a man, gazing on him, discern
That his hot heart was movèd in his breast,
With strong desire yearning towards the blade,
Wherewith in battle-hours of happier days
He gladly had dashed out the lives of men.

But when the prince had ended all his words,

Showing of his adventure, and its end ;
Then Arvan spake unto him words of praise,
Commending him, saying, " Well hast thou done,
O Ervar ! and thy deed is worthily wrought,
Like to the deeds done by my valiant men
In other years, when the great Northland realm
Was 'stablished by the strength of their right hands.
Now are the men dust, who wrought out those deeds ;
For the great gods, ruling supreme in heaven,
Envy men perfect glory such as theirs.
They fell in battle, for their hour was come :
They fell, and made the earth fat with their flesh.
But thou, lament not for fair Mawrawh's love,
Though it hath left thee, her mind being changed.
The love of woman is an unsure thing ;
Who hopes therein may lightly be deceived.
Look on the pearled fruit-blossom on the bough
In early Spring. Its fairness fills the air
With light of beauty. Even the dim days
Look bright when lighted by its hopeful glow.
The husbandman beholds the wealth of bloom,
And hopes fair plenty in the harvest-tide.
Then sudden, on the sun-kissed world of flowers,
Cometh the keen frost, and the sharp round hail
Smites in its pitiless hatred. On the ground
Lie the fair petals ; and the Autumn hours
Shall see no store of fruitage on the boughs.
Ervar, consider. Such is woman's love.
Have I not learnt it, in the bitter days
When the sharp sword went even through my soul,
Urged by hands white and tender to the hilt ?
Me, even me, a king have they betrayed,

Who could enrich them beyond golden dreams,
And minister to their luxurious joys
Beyond the hopes even of diseased desire ;
Yet they betrayed. Thou, what hadst thou to give,
Compared with gifts my power might have bestowed ?
Look on me now, grey-haired. Have I then yet
Aught left wherewith to gladden me ? I am
A lone tree, standing on a barren height,
Far from the rustling joys of groupèd woods.
Around is desolation, and the blank
Of a great silentness. Hushed is each voice
That once rejoiced mine ears. Thou knowest well
Whence came the harm. It was one woman's will
That wrought my doom. Yet had I honoured her,
Even to the giving her an empire's crown ;
And in her hand I placed the rod of power,
That hand wherewith she smote me. Grieve thou not,
Ervar, because of Mawrawh's love withdrawn.
Such love in future days had proved a grief.—
But for this valiant work which thou hast wrought,
This hast thou for reward of service done :
Cheered hast thou Arvan's heart, that was full sad,
Through hearing of thy prowess. Blessèd thou !
Be thy brave warrior name great as thy sire's,
Whose fame fills all the earth. Years full of life,
Abounding in all joys that men desire,
May the gods, guardians of the Northern land,
Grant to thee, prospering thee in all thy ways !”

There ceased he ; and, stretching out his hand,
He took from Ervar the gold-sheathèd sword.
He gazed upon it for an instant mute,
Considering in stillness the clear hilt.

Then a great change passed o'er his warrior face ;
And to the prince he spake full sadly words :
"The gods war with us—this is not the sword."
These were the words that Arvan, speaking, said.—
Now Emeth, being prudent in his heart,
Ere that he went forth to the Northern war,
Had sought out workmen, cunning to contrive
Likeness in metal to an ancient shape ;
Them did he cause to fashion him a sword,
Like to King Arvan's as is leaf to leaf.
The sheath and blade were wrought of yellow gold ;
But for the hilt, in place of diamond-stone,
He bade them choose a crystal clear as ice.
This, being fashioned, he hung up at eve
Beside his couch ; but the true sword concealed,
Fearing its loss by treachery of slaves.
This, Ervar, entering the tent by stealth,
With hurried glance of eyes, untaught to know
The true glaive from the false, perceived ; and took
The untrue falchion, bearing it away.
This was the sword that now to Arvan's hand
Ervar had given with an undoubting heart,
Unfearing of the evil willed by fate.

Prince Ervar listened, with astonished eyes
That stared straight onward, to King Arvan's speech,
Then spake a word : "Arvan, oh ! king of men !
Saidst thou, the sword is not the potent glaive
Wherewith in olden days thou conqueredst men ?"

And Arvan answered, "Ervar, I have said,
Lo ! Emeth, crafty, in his cunning heart,
Hath by his artifice deceived thy thought.
Therefore thy hand hath brought back a vain gift."

Then Ervar cried : " Out on me, that I spared
To smite him where he lay. Unnerved by love,
I have fallen far from manhood and renown.
Yea ! meditating deeds worthy of fame,
Have given me to the mockery of men.
Now will King Emeth in his prudent heart
Considering, laugh at this my futile toil,
And mock my empty hands, laughing loud laughs.
Also the chieftains in the Western camp
Will jeer at me, despising much my name,
Who have been foiled in this mine enterprise.
But I will still confound them. I will seek
Once more, devising other ways, the camp,
And slay King Emeth, winning yet the sword."

Then Arvan spake : " Refrain, for the attempt
Shall not succeed, seeing the immortal ones
Who sit on high, 'stablishing mortal fate
Decree it not. Me of the shining sword
Have they deprived. By treachery unespied
Was this thing wrought. Nor may it be undone,
Since nought in this world is, save as they will,
Seeing they rule the lives of flesh-made men.
Nor can these, wandering many ways of life,
Nor thinking many thoughts, prudent of heart,
Avoid the over-arching bounds of fate.
This may no man, born of a woman, do,
Seeing that no man, walking on two feet,
Though journeying all life's days, even many years,
Can pass beyond the o'er-arching dome of blue ;
But all under the sky are bound by fate.
Therefore, thou having failed, Ervar, refrain,
For what man is there who can strive with gods ? "

CANTO XX.

KING EMETH swore an oath, making it sure ;
The dread Oath of the Throne, which God nor man,
Once having sworn, reverses (for his life,
Who disregards, is subject to all grief,
While here he wearing flesh walks the green earth,
And in that other world torment of heart,
Unspeakable, awaits him evermore).
Therefore he having sworn was of it bound,
That whosoe'er conspired against the king,
Being with the foe a friend, sinning thereby
A sin against the Westland, and its king,
Wherethrough the sword was lost, should being ta'en
Be burnèd on the Field of Shields with fire.

For when the king, awaking from his sleep,
Sought in the first dawn, ere the sun had risen,
The place where the great sword at eventide
Shone bright, in its much jewelled scabbarding,
He marked its place unfilled. Divining theft,
Then did he fear some traitor in the camp,
Who, weaving hidden plots against his life,
Might undiscovered overthrow his power.
For thus he said—"What though the sword be false,
Cheating the eyes and hand of him who stole ;
Yet he, the spoiler, marked not the deceit,

Perchance, erelong the truth upon his soul
Shall dawn, and he shall seek him out the blade
Anew, succeeding where he failed before.
Ere then this ill-thing happen, let me seek,
If haply I may find the traitor heart,
Which having stilled, safety shall be again.

So, rising from his sleep, he sent forth men
To his great chieftains, showing his command.
King Emeth saith—"Come with thine utmost speed,
For the realm's safety needeth counsel-words."

Then came the chieftains, gathering at his word
Obedient, for they knew his prudence great,
And that he hasted not, save with due cause.
But when they had assembled unto him,
Sitting before him in the silk-roofed tent,
Then did King Emeth to the chiefs speak words,
Showing them all the nature of his doubt,
And of the treason, since the sword was lost.

Thus then he spake: "Great chieftains, wise of heart,
Instructed of the gods to utter words,
Emeth desireth counsel, being grieved.
Know then that yestereve, after the feast,
Wherein men thank the gods for their good gift,
For that they, giving, gave me to be born,
And live upon the earth a man with men,
I slept securely, having quaffed much wine,
Even as is meet upon my day of birth.
Then did some traitor steal through the thick gloom,
'Scaping the eyes of the unwatchful guards,
And craftily possess him of the sword.
Thus deem I, for at eventide it shone
Bright in its scabbard on the silken wall.

But when with early dawn I oped my eyes
Its place was empty. Now then counsel straight,
What shall we work, since need there is of speed ?
Whereby shall I avenge me of my foe ? ”

Then the chiefs spake : “ Enquire thou of the guard,
Whether they marked ought of this treachery,
Or saw a lurking prowler yesternight,
Or heard suspicious accents in the gloom.”

And Emeth answered to his officers—
“ Speak to them, that they stand before the king.”
But when they entering stood, with bowèd heads
And eyes submissive, waiting Emeth’s will,
He spake, stern questioning : “ Oh ! armèd men
Well have ye watched over the royal sleep,
Also King Emeth’s head have guarded well !
This know, being ashamed ; some evil spy,
Traitorous, who plotted harm against my days,
Hath in the night ’scaped your unwatching eyes.
Yea ! from our slumber-chamber’s silken walls,
He with unfearing hand hath ta’en the sword.
Ye then, if ye would flee deserved death,
Reveal some word, whereby my soul, grown wise,
May learn what man is guilty of the deed.”

Then the guards’ cheeks grew ashy-white with fear,
Also their hearts stopped for one pulsing still,
While their knees trembled, for they were afraid.
Thus they affrighted, gathered in one crowd,
Shook like a company of quivering leaves,
Gathered upon one tree ; which when the wind
Sweeps from the west, and smites them with cold breath.
Being dismayèd, quake exceedingly.
They therefore answered with quick, faltering words,

“Great king, lord of the lives of these thy slaves,
Surely we watched all night with open eyes,
So that not even a lizard might have crawled,
Unmarked of us, beneath thy silken walls ;
Yet saw we nothing. Now then, know, some god,
Or evil demon, of our eyes unseen,
Hath, willing to grieve thee, entered in the gloom.
Therefore impute not error to thy slaves,
Who yet are faithful, serving with all truth.”

But Emeth answered scornful to their speech,
“Ill men, revering not the powers divine,
Heap their own sins on the right-doing gods.
Yet this I asked not, whether the great gods
Stole the fair sword from my silk-curtained tent,
But whether aught thereof ye saw or heard ?
This therefore answer ; for this thing is best.”

Then the guards answered, fearing Emeth's wrath,
“We nothing heard, oh, king ! we nothing saw.
This evil thing is unknown of our soul.”

Then, entering in, the captain of the guard,
Even Ruach, bowed low before the king,
And said, “Thy servant hath an unshewn word,
The which he fain would speak in the king's ears.”
Replying, Emeth answered, “Say thy say.
Wise art thou Ruach, and of prudent care,
Nor would'st thou waste the hours with idle words.”

Obeisance made great Ruach once again,
Thereafter shewed he to the king his thought,
“Far at the utmost boundary of the camp
Where, facing Rhaon's walls, it bounds the plain,
The watchmen, watching through the hours of night,
Seized on their journeyings, toward the dawn,

A woman, catlike stealing through the gloom,
Returning from the city of the foe.
Her having bound, they questioned of her aim,
But she continued speechless. Yet at last,
Being overgreatly threatened with the scourge,
And other griefs, such as subdue the soul,
Conquered of terrors, such as women fear,
She spake things, heard of us with unbelief,
Declaring, 'I am Mawrawh, the princess,
Daughter of Emeth, king of all the West,
Suffer me therefore straightway to depart.' "

And Emeth answered—"This thing may not be.
My child rests in her tent, slumbering secure.
This woman is some spy, who with vain words
Thinketh to blind the hearts of watching men.
But bringing, set her now before my face,
That we may know, concerning this, the truth."

Thereon went Ruach forth, and brought with speed
The woman, veiled and bound, before the king.
And she before him stood with head abased,
As one greatly ashamed, and was dumb.

Then the king spake to her: "Who then art thou,
Who, stealing through the gloom into our camp,
Comest from Rhaon's walls with ill intent,
A spy, unto the army of the king.
Harm hast thou wrought against thy days. Thy life
Is forfeit to the law. Yet if thou show
The purpose of thy heart, concealing nought,
See! I will spare thee, being merciful,
Nor thirsting greatly for a woman's blood."

He spake; but she replied not, standing mute
As though o'erwhelmed with greatness of her fear,

Motionless as a pinnacle of stone,
That dumbly, far up on the summit hills,
Stands stirless in the dawning, wrapt in clouds.

Then spake he yet again—"Answerest thou not ?
Know, there are tortures in my slayers' hands,
Pincers red-heated in the furnace flame,
Wherewith to tear from off thy shrinking bones
The tender living flesh. Scourges are theirs,
Woven with spiky points, bristling with wire,
That men do fear. Thou, who from thy slight shape
Should'st be a girl ; how wilt thou dare such woe ?
Wherefore be wise and speak, even words of truth."

Yet she replied not to his threatenings ;
But stood as one whose senses had ta'en flight,
Nor left her skill wherewith to ward her doom.

Then unto Ruach, Emeth, the great king
Spake, grievèd by her silence obstinate,
"Go near unto the woman. From her head
Remove the cloaking covering of her eyes,
That we may know her, looking on her face."

So Ruach hearkening unto the king,
Plucked from the woman's shrinking head, with
 speed,
The covering veil ; and Emeth gazed on her.
He gazed ! Then stretching out his kingly hands,
As one who wardeth off a terrible sight,
He crièd with a woeful, bitter cry,
"Thou, Mawrawh !" and was still. And the princess,
For it was she, uplifted her grey eyes,
Full filled with grief and horror ; as she looked
Upon her father's face, and knew his woe,
The fire of shame failed from her cheek and brow,

To a dim, deathly pallor yielding place,
And with a broken cry, senseless she fell.

Silent, king Emeth sat a breathing space,
Gazing on Mawrawh, where death-pale she lay,
Like a white ivory sceptre, glistening fair,
Fit for the grasp of kings, by careless hands
Flung down upon the base and dusty earth.

Then to the captain of the guard he said—
“Call hither Chesed straightway with all speed
From where she sitteth watching in the tent;
Say thou ‘King Emeth hath a word for thee,’
Yet speak thou not to her, revealing aught
That hath befallen the princess, my child,
Seeing myself alone, would question her.”

So Ruach straightway sought the grey-haired nurse,
Her summoning unto the royal tent.

But ere she came, King Emeth, in his arms
Raising his child, into the inner tent
Bearing her, gently laid her on his couch;
Then, turning, sat once more upon his throne.

Soon, entering in, the venerable nurse,
Grey-haired, who fostered Mawrawh from a child,
Stood before Emeth, hearkening to his words.
Then the king spake to her: “Oh! ancient slave,
This is the word that I would speak with thee.
Bring hither Mawrawh the princess with speed:
Fain would I commune with her of a thing.”

But the nurse trembled very grievously,
Seeing that she was shaken with great fear;
For the king’s wrath is as the rage of storms.
Scarce, through alarm, might she control her voice,
So that her thoughts might find swift birth in words.

Thus then she spake : " Let not King Emeth's wrath
Wax hot against his slave. She hath arisen,
And hath gone forth at night, all unperceived ;
Nor was her pathway shown unto my soul."

And he—" Declare the truth. For if thou lie,
Chastisements wait thee. But if thou confess,
Teaching me all the secrets of thy heart,
Nor hiding aught, see ! I will spare thy days."

And she replied : " Great Emeth, king of hosts !
Cause know I none wherefore her pilgrim feet,
Adventurous, have attempted paths nocturn.
Haply her heart, moved by some strange, clear dream,
Such as doth frequent visit maidens' sleep,
Hath urged her forth, unconscious of her way.
Suffer me then, seeking, to search around
Throughout the nearer pathways of the camp,
So shall I surely find thy child again."

He said : " Refrain from search ; for she is found.
Beyond the utmost boundary of the host,
Wandering she came by night unto the camp ;
But whence she came no man knowing hath shown.
Now lieth she in silence, having swooned.
Is she not in the inner tent ? Retire.
Minister to her need. More narrowly
Watch thou henceforth her way. Forfeit thy life,
Should she, unseen of thee, steal forth anew.
When the light shines upon her seeing eyes,
Me summon straightway unto Mawrawh's couch."

So the grey-haired nurse went slow her way,
Doubtfully shaking her age-whitened head,
Murmuring within her heart unuttered words :
" Safe is my child. Naught knoweth the great king

Of the ill-chance, and Mawrawh's hapless love.
Well is it ; for, revealed, great were his wrath.
Her would he blame ; but me he would destroy,
Who suffered, in her passionate regard
To rise towards the prince, her country's foe ;
For the child's fault is to the slave a crime.
But from my lips ne'er shall the king learn truth ;
Since the gods gave me lips wherewith to lie,
Whenever meet occasion shall arise.
Surely no fitter time shall come to me
For exercise of falsehood. The dear child,
Mawrawh, shall through my lying shun all blame ;
Also, no chastisement shall vex my life.
Therefore, he questioning, my lips are dumb."

Thus said the slave, with her heart communing,
And went her way, nor showed to Emeth truth.

But Emeth spake unto his chiefs again :
"The ancient slave naught knoweth of the chance
That led my daughter forth beyond the camp.
This saw I ; for her eyes informed with fear,
Yet spake no thought of guilt. But for the sword,
Tidings will doubtless come unto our ears,
Showing the truth concerning him who stole.
This I decree : The guards, who at their posts
Slept, watching not the slumbers of the king,
Smit of the sword, shall suddenly expire.
This, if ye think unjust, show forth your thought."

And the chiefs answered : "Meet it is, and just ;
For they protected not King Emeth's sleep,
But slumbered. Therefore let them die the death."

King Emeth answered : "As my thought your thought.
Let the word go forth that the slayers slay.

So shall men henceforth watch more warily,
Not suffering foes to enter this my tent.
But ye, my chieftains, hearken with your ears.
If rumour rise of the king's stolen sword,
Make the thought mine, instant, without delay."

Thus spake King Emeth, speaking not true words ;
For that he deemed, within his secret heart,
His daughter's wanderings linked with the lost sword :
Yet spake this not, willing his men of war
Should join no thought of guilt with Mawrawh's name.

Afterward, when the counsellors had passed,
Each on his way, the king went in and gazed
Upon fair Mawrawh, where she silent lay
In a deep stupor, orphaned of all light.
Then to the slaves who stood around the couch,
Ministering to her need, with eager thought
Endeavouring her awaking from the blank
And blackness of her swoon, he spake brief words :
" When the princess revives to life anew,
Opening her eyes, and speaking with her lips,
Then let the tidings come to me with speed,
Since I would gaze on her reviving life."

These words spake Emeth, and he went his way
Heavy of heart, for that he loved her much ;
Nor could he solve the mystery of the flight
From out the camp, but he within his soul
Divined dread shapes of unaccomplished ill.
For as a rock, descending on some lake,
Ere that it strike the glassy, shining wave,
Projects its shadow first, then swiftly strikes,
Chasing away, with instant blow, the calm ;
So did the image of descending woe

Vex with its presence Emeth's grievèd heart.
And the hours passed, and yet no summons came
To Emeth, waiting anxious in his tent ;
For the light dawned not upon Mawrawh's eyes.
Lastly, when twilight from the earth had fled,
Down to the under-world, and the white moon
Ascended with slow feet the arch of heaven,
He, not enduring longer to control
Th' impatience of his heart, went in and sat
Beside his daughter, gazing on her face.

Long did he watch her, waiting signs of hope ;
But the white lids curtained the orbs of sight ;
The silken lashes rested on her cheeks,
Unmoving ; and her hands and feet were still.

So the night fled ; and Emeth went his way
Toward the dawn, snatching brief space of rest,
That he might strengthen him to meet the toil
Which daily waits the labouring hands of kings.

Another night, and yet another day,
Fled by, and still the princess motionless
Lay, girt about with shadows of the grave.
At last, one hour, the king, watching her swoon,
Saw once again the light of her grey eyes,
And knew her soul awakening unto life.
Drear was the waking. Uninformed of thought,
The great eyes shone ; and as on Emeth's face
They rested, suddenly the train of thought
Suspended through her sleep, reknit anew,
Possessed her soul, and she poured forth wild words,
Passionate, incoherent ; for her mind
Ruled not her speech, nor knew she that she said.
"It was the gods," she cried ; "they filled my heart

With love for Ervar. Ah! false-hearted one,
Where is the sword? How will my father rage!
King Emeth is my father.—I have loved—
I have loved Ervar. He is fair of face.—
Where is the god of love? He wrecked my soul,
Filling it with desire.—I am a girl,
Only a girl. Can I o'ercome a god?—
The sword!—the sword! Ah! he hath ta'en the sword.”

There crièd she a sharp and sorrowful cry,
And then again was dumb. And Emeth stood
Over against her, watching her white face
With stormy, grief-filled eyes. Yea! it had come.
His child—his own; beloved of his soul,
More precious deemèd by his loving thought
Than is the lifeful wealth of chaliced blood
Held in the ruddy goblet of the heart,—
Even she must bear henceforward in his eyes
A name, discrownèd of its olden light,
She having leagued her soul with traitorous men.

Thus, then, he stood, revolving heavy thoughts
Within the vexèd cavern of his head.
At last he, rousing him, unto the nurse,
The slave, who, trembling, watched beside the couch,
White with great fear, waiting the words of doom
From Emeth's lips, deeming her sin made plain,
Turning, spake fiercely with great voice of wrath:
“What is this evil word that she hath said?
Disclose it, or the torture-hooks of fire
Shall pierce thy flesh. All agony of pain
Shall vex thee, rending from thy heart the truth.”

And she—“Alas! my lord, what shall I speak?
For the princess hath uttered in her dream

Revealing words ; nor may the truth be hid.
Thou, therefore, hearken to the thing that is.
When from the battle by the southern stream
The prisoners, captured by the Western men,
Were brought in triumph down the city's ways,
Prince Ervar, sorely wounded in the fray,
Came with the throng of captives, borne of men.
Him Mawrawh, gazing from her window, saw.
She saw—she loved him. And thenceforward sought
With all desire his presence. For her dream
Hath been of him since that distressful day ;
Nor, labouring greatly, can I change her heart.
More know I not. Whether she had gone forth
Then, when the guard perceived her in the gloom,
Sorrow-impelled, in sleep's unconscions hours,
Seeking the prince, her lover, through the night :
Or whether, waking, she essayed to flee
From out the camp, desiring Rhaon's walls,
This, lord of nations, wot the gods alone."

Then Emeth answered : " If thy tale be false,
See ! thou shalt die. But if thy tale be true
Thou shalt be sorely chastened, yet not slain.
Henceforward do my bidding. So thy life
Shall be whole in thee. When to outer light
The princess from her fever dream awakes,
Knowing things actual ; then summon me—
For I would commune with her of her fault."

Thus Emeth spake, and forthwith went his way,
Nor saw he Mawrawh through a week of days—
For that the fever yet possessed her life.

But when the sickness-cloud had passed away
From her soul's heaven, and she with sense-ruled eyes

Knew things that are ; then, mindful of his word,
The slave, desiring pardon for her fault,
Summoned her lord, even Emeth, with all speed,
Who came, and, standing by his daughter's couch,
Gazèd upon her. Pale and weak she showed,
As one who, greatly wounded, from the field
Is borne, drained of the ruddy flood of life
By sword-made gashes ; for her soul was sick,
She having suffered sore defeat of heart ;
Also the fever-plague had brought her low.

Then Emeth, though he came with wrath of soul,
Meaning her treacherous action to upbraid,
Felt all the fierceness ebbing from his mood,
In presence of her suffering. Anger fled,
And a deep voiceless pity held his heart,
Remembering how she had been greatly dear.
Therefore he spake not to her word of blame,
His soul this suffering not. But thus he said :
“ Daughter ! have rest of heart. Be whole once more ;
Then will I commune with thee of the past.”

So went he on his way. But when the days
Had brought upon their still, health-laden wings,
Strength to the princess, he returned, and stood
Communing with her, showing her her fault.
“ Oh ! evil daughter, who hast brought mine head,
Hoar with grey, venerable locks, full low,
Staining thy soul with treason's horrid guilt,
Through which great sin I suffer ; who would blame
If I, contemning thy dishonoured life,
Disowned thee henceforth—for thou art most vile ;
Nor can one name thy baseness wholly paint,
Who hast betrayed alike thy land and sire.

Since, should I call thee parricide, the word
Pictures but half thy guilt, who did'st betray
Thy country to the accursèd foeman's sword:
Or should I say, 'Betrayed of thy land,'
This leaves untold thy sin against thy sire—
Sin grievous to be linked with Mawrawh's name.
And all this hast thou done, urged by desire
For thy fair youth, whose sunrise-painted cheeks,
And golden wealth of hair, and lithe strong frame
Thou hast preferred to me, and to thy land.
Fitly might I renounce thee in thy sin ;
Yet, for I love thee with a weak love still,
Such as fond fathers feel for a false child,
Hear that I say. Thy life thou hast destroyed,
But if thou wilt confess thy grievous guilt,
Revealing all the texture of the truth,
I will endeavour for thee rescue yet,
Nor lift mine own hand, Mawrawh, 'gainst thy days."

Then she : "I will speak truth, for through my life
I have not uttered lies ; nor will I now
Cloak past deeds with a tissue of feigned words,
Seeing that I am not a false-tongued slave,
But a king's daughter, upright in my speech.
Oh ! father, if, being grieved by that I show,
Thou deemest my guilt great, refrain from wrath
Of angry words ; but, if thy child have sinned,
Chasten me as thou wilt, even with death,
If death thou deem deservèd of my soul.
Yea, thou hast rightly heard. When Ervar came
Unto our city in the captive throng,
I, gazing from the palace window, saw :
I saw him where he lay upon the couch,

Pale through blood-draining wounds ; and, at the sight,
The Love-God breathed fire-breath into my soul.
Thenceforward was it filled with fever dreams.
Nor had I rest of heart till after hours ,
Brought communing with him, who was my life.
He loved me ; and our hands, placed each in each,
Made fast the lip-recorded troth of words.
Thereafter, while we lived in all delight,
Rejoicing in love-dreams, fearful tidings came.
Thou, in thy wrath, remembering slaughter wrought,
Would'st burn the captive men with eating flame.
This hearing, I took thought within my breast,
Contriving Ervar's flight ; for him I loved.
He fled. I, tarrying, with a constant mind
Sought that my word to him might be redeemed ;
Nor strove in vain. After much pleading speech,
Me hither hast thou brought, even me, thy child.
Then did I send a message by a slave,
A Northman—even for this deed set free—
That he might show my presence with the host.
He bore a sun-flower from me to the prince,
Which Ervar, having looked on, knew the truth.
He sought me in my tent ; but when he claimed
Teaching, whereby his hands might win the sword,
Then I refused. He, with false-spoken words,
Feigning assent, disowned his purposed deed.
Then went we forth unto great Rhaon's walls ;
There was I left in ward ; but he returned,
Seeking the camp. Also he found the sword.
He brought it to me, where, beside the gate
I stood, watched by the soldiers ; and he said :
' Consider, in my hand I bear the sword.

Wilt thou go with me ? ' But I answered him,
Saying, ' I will not go.' Then I returned.
There did thy guard arrest me in the gloom,
And bring me to thy tent. The rest thou know'st.
Now hearken. I will plead, saying few words,
Since this thou hast allowed. I sinned a sin,
That know I well, loving my country's foe;
Since hate is for the foe, love for the friend.
Such fit allotment is the will of heaven ;
Nor may weak men reverse the gods' strong law.—
But me the Love-God goaded to this path ;
Where he commands even the great gods must bow,
Much more their laws are discrowned of their sway.
This also judge, that if the Mighty Gods
Who rule above, sitting on silver thrones,
Bow, being submissive, how must a slight girl,
Whose heart is of the weak things of the earth,
Yield to the might of the great Love-God's will.
This plead I. Thou, consider well my plea.
Yet if thou do not hold my word of worth,
But deemest me all guilty as at first,
Sinner of sin so great, that all the tears
Wept of all sorrows since man walked the earth,
May not efface the stain ; refrain from wrath,
Seeing there is no need of sharpened words,
Or goading of keen speech, such as men use
To wrest concealèd knowledge from the soul,
Or wreak sore vengeance on the grievèd heart ;
For nought remaineth now of me unshown,
And I have fallen too low to shrink from shame,
Even beneath all hope of earthly fear."

He answered her : " Truth is it thou hast said,

Oh ! fallen, fallen lamentably low,
Who once wert the fair jewel of the land ;
Words are not, wherewith I might speak with thee,
And show thee all the greatness of my grief.
Thou, as a cloud that, golden-bright at dawn,
Rejoiceth with its light the eastern heavens,
Where it had birth, wert, in thy morning hours,
A joy of heart, who art a sorrow now.
The day wears on, and the fair vapour grows
Into a black, destroying, demon shape,
Wherein lurks slaying fire to blight and burn.
Such art thou now to me. Oh ! Mawrawh, Mawrawh !
I dreamed not, when in childhood, by my knee
Thou played'st, innocent light within thine eyes,
That my soul e'er should look on thee with shame,
Which shame I have, knowing thou sayest truth.
For, not thy present words alone reveal
The unblest grief that hath assailed thy life ;
But thereto other witness hath agreed.
Yea ! in the heated fever of thy dream,
I, standing by thee, watching in the night,
Since that I loved thee with desire of heart ;
Heard from thy lips the story of thy guilt.
Also thy nurse hath shown to me thy shame,
Deeming concealment vain. Therefore I hold
Thy crimeful love for Ervar, the king's foe,
Beyond all healing chance of gracious doubt :
Also therethrough how the great sword was lost.
Alas for thee, oh, daughter ! who hast fallen,
Struck by ill-chance, or some accursèd fate,
And now low liest in defiling mire,
Fit but for trampling of despising feet.

' My heart much grievèd, Mawrawh, through thy sin,
Is all too sore for the weak war of words,
Beneath the scorn of base men hast thou fallen,
Who wast my joy. Me hast thou wronged, thy sire ;
And thou hast spoken unto him, thy foe,
With a bare face, concealing not thy cheeks ;
Nor hid from him the fairness of thine eyes.
This hast thou done, impelled by great desire ;
For shame there is not which thou hast not wrought.
And I—I might have left thee in thy guilt,
To face the scorn of all right-judging men ;
But that thou art, though guilty, yet my child.
Now have I sworn—and the great gods have heard—
That they, through whom the sword was lost, shall die.
Thou also seem'st involved in this their guilt,
Since thou hast leagued thyself with him, my foe.
If after hours reveal my broken vow,
Will not the wide land scorn their perjured king ?
The anger of the gods will rest on me.
Then will men, arming them in hate, arise,
Warring against me. Thus the land shall wear,
Through guilt-begetting sin, which thou hast sinned,
The stain of blood upon its ample breast.
Yet shall my voice not judge thee. I will bring,
Since need there is of judgment on thy sin,
Thee in thy guilt before the judgment-thrones,
Where the wise Three sit, giving righteous dooms."

She answered—"Not for me be thou forsworn,
For this thing I desire not. Unto me
Give that fair judgment thou wouldst give to all.
More if thou gavest, know I would complain."

Then did King Emeth, leading with his hand

His daughter, bring her in before the men,
The greyhaired men, who judge for the great gods,
Uel and Gar and Adin, names of might,
Revered even to the outer edge of earth.
Therefore they, on their thrones within the tent,
Sat judging judgments. And fair Mawrawh came
Before them meekly, with abased head,
And stood unmoving, speaking not at all.

Then did King Emeth lay before the men
His doubt, telling them plainly of his oath ;
Also the nature of his daughter's deed,
Who, of the Love God urged, had loved the foe ;
Yet had recoiled from plunder of the sword,
Though of her lover-foe urged to the deed.
These things he told, using all truth of speech,
Nought hiding from them, nor augmenting aught.

But when the hoary-headed men had heard
The king, and all the history of the act,
They in their hearts took counsel, turning o'er
The memory-treasured laws, which they with pain
Had from the fathers' lips learned in the past,
And graven deeply on their inmost hearts ;
So that not sorrow, nor the change of times,
Nor silent lapse of ever-gliding years,
Could wipe away the record from their souls.
For thus the gods' laws are from age to age
Passed onward, graven not on man-hewn stone,
Nor traced upon the shining bark of trees,
Lest sacrilegious hands might mutilate ;
But hoarded of the wise men in their hearts.
So, on occasion fit, when time of need
Is for earth's children, darkened in their thoughts,

To know the will of Heaven, the wise men speak
The certain word, and make their pathway plain.

Thus then the wise men spake, answering the king
With prudence, after cogitation meet :

“ King Emeth, hearken to the god-shewn law,
Which we with searchings of the heart have found.
Since Mawrawh loved not perfectly her foe,
She giving not the sword into his hand,
Though he desired it ; also since she came,
Abhorring him when he had ta'en the spoil,
Seeking the camp—know she hath greatly sinned,
Yet not such sin as that she needs must die
Through thee, who art the source of her life's days.
Since that her love for him was not all true,
Else had she not forsaken him, nor turned
Upon her path, returning to her tent—
Therefore it were not meet to slay thy child.
Yet, forasmuch as she hath partly loved,
So haply is enwrapt in Ervar's guilt,
And thou hast sworn a haply-binding oath,
Evil may be determined 'gainst the land.
This is the gods' law that our lips have shewn.”

Then Emeth said : “ If that I slay my child,
Wrath may arise against me, having sinned ;
And if I spare her, evil may arise.
Is this the thought that ye have shown in words ? ”

The wise men answered him—“ It is the thought.”

Emeth replied : “ If I may rightly spare,
Know I will pardon ; for I love her yet,
Nor willingly would dip hands in her blood.”

They said : “ Thou mayest pardon, if thou wilt.
Slaying or sparing, evil may arise.”

Then Emeth spake to Mawrawh : " Thou hast sinned,
Yet not all perfectly ; thence earning death.
Therefore may I absolve thee. If thou pray
Pardon for thine offence, it is forgiven.
Forget not thy great guilt. Haply thy land
Will weep red tears for the weak woman's love,
Wherewith, O Mawrawh ! thou hast loved thy foe."

But Mawrawh stood and spake not. Then he said,
"Speakest thou not ? Art thou not glad of life ?
Mightest thou not in this thy sin have died ?"

And Mawrawh spake—"How then can I rejoice,
If through my life woe may befall my land ?
Did I not stand 'twixt Ervar and the sword,
This fearing, that a curse upon my race
Might fall, it being taken ? Now, in vain
The sacrifice. My life haply itself
The curse may prove which shall my country slay.
Why should I joy thus compassed round with ill ?
What remedy may be for such a grief ?"

Then to the wise men said she, "Ancient ones,
Loved of the gods, counsel me of my thought,
Even me, tear-blinded in my inmost soul.
If the king's hand be not against my life,
Yet if I die, shall the land breathe anew
The breath of safety, danger being o'erpast ?"

They answered Mawrawh—"If thy blood be spilt,
Safety shall be once more unto thy land ;
But if thou live, instant the curse may fall."

Then said she, "I will die. Not through my sin
Shall the land mourn. I will be offered up
Unto the Mighty Ones in sacrifice,
So shall the people of my tribe have rest.

Hinder me not, O father ! of my will,
For it is set to die. Thus Mawrawh's name
Shall wear no evil blot in after days,
But her late virtue shall efface her guilt."

Then Emeth said—"No need is there of death,
O child ! need only of a wiser life.

Thee the good gods have spared ; therefore live."

But she—"They have not spared, their faint release
Absolving not my land. Nay, let it pass,
This life of earth, which once seemed very fair,
But which the gods give not that I may know.
Fair rose my sun, clear dawning upon earth ;
But dark, waylaying clouds have quenched its light ;
Nor gleams even one blue chasm in Heaven's black roof,
Presaging better hours. Let the day close,
For my tired heart yearns toward the night of death."

Her answered straight her father : "Thou, poor child
What knowest thou of that thou dost desire ?
Thou being weary of a passing pain,
Turnest with heart-desire unto the grave,
As a burnt child flies to its mother's arms.
But aged eyes, that, from a nearer spot,
Gaze on the gloomy presence of the tomb,
Learn, other shows its close, forbidding face,
Than young, unknowing hearts have featured it ;
For terrible even to the brave is death.
Be patient ; for thou needest not to haste :
Life's day wears very swiftly to the close."

She said—"Oh ! not so swiftly but my heart
Would speed the wished-for setting of its sun.
This would I gladly do, even though my land
Naught gained from the dull, forsaken hours.

How much more joyful should I greet mine end,
When the land's children therethrough shall have rest ! ”

Thus spake she, without waverings of the heart ;
Yet would the king have answered her again,
Essaying, with persuasion of soft speech,
To move her from her purpose. But the men,
The Agèd Three, seeing her soul was set,
Thus spake, decreeing : “ Let her die the death ;
Nor thou, oh ! Emeth, strive against the thought.
Have not the great gods given it to her heart ? ”

CANTO XXI.

HOURS fled away, and days, and weeks of days.
Around the walls of Rhaon raged the war
Unceasing, and the strife-storm darkened fast.
Full oft, from out the city's brazen gates,
Irach led forth the hosts, arrayed for war,
All valiant men, stern lifters of the shield,
Swift-footed as the stag, brave too of heart
As a brown bear that guards its mountain cave.
And many a Western warrior bit the ground,
Foaming in death-pangs, smitten by the sword.
Nor was the earth unred, through months of days,
Before the gates, seeing few suns went down
That had not gazed on life-blood newly shed.
But scanty were the swords that fenced the North
Compared with Emeth's warrior multitudes.

Then Irach, seeing that the steadfast land
Was by the foe's might wrested from his grasp,
With his own heart in silence communèd :
"The foe," he said, "prevailèth on the land ;
But, for our ships are many, on the wave
We hold disputeless sway. Behind the walls,
We will defy the fury of the West ;
Nor match ourselves, unequal to the strife,
With the scarce 'minished hosts of Western swords.

Time will avenge our loss. The calm, slow months
Will sap away his strength. Our ships, that bring
To us supplies of life-preserving corn,
Shall hem him in, wasting the weary lands
By prayers, sent forth from their fertile wombs,
Destroyers of the shores with sword and flame.
Emeth may weary of the lengthened war,
Inglorious, harassing ; where the foe strikes
Sudden, retreating ere the soldiers' swords
Are from their sheathed sleep aroused to slay,
Into his ocean-girdled ships that float,
Forts unapproached on the protecting main."
Thus spake the chief ; and, for the thought was wise,
So that men saw the prudence of the thought,
The thought bore instant fruit in warrior deeds.
The chieftains' wills, swayed by the leader's soul,
Bent to their task, as labouring horses bend,
Dragging the plough through all the up-torn fields,
When sounds the peasant's voice, and cracks the lash.

So sped the swift ships, laying waste the earth,
Where, renovated by the toilers' hands,
King Emeth's warriors hoped much provender.
Also their hearts were harassed evermore
By sudden onslaughts, made all warningless,
Till died the courage in their hairy breasts.
But to the Northmen in the city pent,
The swift barks, travelling over ocean ways,
Came ever, bringing succours, corn and wine.
Thus, being revived, their souls grew strong anew,
And waxed presumptuous, confident of success ;
For the vain people, moved by every change
That chanceth to them, easily by success,

And sunny gleams of short prosperity,
Are comforted, after excess of grief,
And bask in the brief warmth of passing joy.
Even as also, in rejoicing hours,
They, shadowed by a sudden cloud, will crouch,
O'erwhelmed by the expected wrath of storms.
For men, like children, fickle-hearted still,
Pass ever swiftly from delight to grief,
Or from the shedding of tears to extreme joy.

Yet 'mid the general trust that hoped success,
Irach much doubted of the warfare's end ;
For seldom the swift renders of the wave
Brought the sword-wielders to the royal town ;
And the brave Northern ranks showed death-thinned now.

Also a dreader foe assailed the North,
In this the fate-fraught instant of the strife,
Than Emeth and his men, though prompt to slay.
For the dread Moon-god, jealous in his heart
Of higher worship by the Northern realm,
And nobler sacrifice given to the Sun,
Was wroth against them—in his soul divine
Cherishing thoughts of evil. Night by night,
He, seated on his throne, raised the white rod,
Far-stretching, silver sceptre, feared of men,
Who, being mortal, dwell on the green earth ;
And silent smote on the close-folded doors
Of the death-destined ones, who, wrapt in sleep,
Forgot the weary day, not fearing fate.
But wheresoe'er the Moon-god's vengeful rod,
Far-reaching, struck, heard of the Immortal Ones,
Yet echoing not in men's sleep-sealèd ears,
They being over dull, clogged with much clay,

To hear sounds telling of celestial deeds,
The blue plague, entering in, seized on its prey,
As a cat steals upon a sleeping bird,
And slays it unresisting, barred from flight.
Through the calm night men died. The hot clear day,
For summer now fired all the northern air,
Sheltered not from the god's avenging power.
In the high-ways, in the much-crowded marts,
At feasts, at burials, in the temple courts,
Ay! at the very altars of the gods,
Men, women, children fell, oppressed with death,
For the white Moon-god spared not, being wrath.

All hearts sank trembling greatly. Pallid fear
Ruled queen-like in the city. Dreadful thoughts
Filled warrior minds. Haggard, death-dreading eyes
Saw even unpresent ill. A clammy mist,
At morn, and even, rising from the stream,
Spread o'er the city like a visible shroud.
Then said the Easterns that the realm was doomed,
For, in their land, thus folded men the corpse
In fitting winding-sheet, robe of the dead.
At night a marvellous star blazed in the sky,
Wielding a pale sword in its slaying hands.
Outstretched above the city of the Rha,
It filled each soul with visions of affright,
Men knowing that the gods warred on the North.
Thick lay the dead men in the streets. The stream
Rolled downward to the ocean, choked with dead.
Fierce through the ways rushed fever-frenzied crowds,
Death-stricken, robeless, with green livid spots,
Signs of corruption, on their polished limbs;
In their wild hearts the fiery plague enthroned,

Rending their frames with anguish as of flame.
Warriors forgot their courage. Women lost
All shrinkings of sweet modesty ; they came
Bare-bodied from their chambers' hidden depths,
Lifting up dolorous voices of complaint.
And through the weary night, and through the day
The shrieks arose throughout the city's ways,
And wailings low of anguish, till her streets
Were but vast charnel-houses, filled with dead.
The warmen's hearts fainted, and were dismayed,
Gazing on death-thinned ranks ; for the great host
That fought for Arvan, holding Rhaon's walls,
Dwindled away, swift failing, as the array
Of summer flowers that doth forsake the mead
When autumn in his anger walks the earth.
Scarce there remained men to guard the walls,
For vast the girdling ramparts of the town,
And spaces were there spoiled of defence.
But Emeth's hosts increased ; for the land
Far in the West, sent from her fertile womb,
Mother of men, armed warriors, as the swarms
Of the wild birds, that northward pass in spring,
Darkening the heavens with their outspreading wings.

Feebler the Northland grew in her distress.
Revolt ate deep into the city's heart,
Goaded beyond endurance with her griefs.
Nor did fresh succours reach her. Every man
Shunned Rhaon as men shun a house of death.
Also within the provinces vain men
Arose rebelling, leading many swords
To war against the realm ; for Arvan's hand
No more restrained them. The confident foe,

Bolder through Northern weakness, pressed the
assault,

Fastening on Rhaon's walls, where, weak for strife,
Her armour of hewn stone, uptowered less strong
Toward the adverse sky. Close clung the foe,
Even as a gaunt hound, on the shaggy neck
Of a great stag, fastens with shining fangs,
Dragging its antlered pride down to the dust.
Beneath the girdling ramparts, day by day,
Men, burrowing deep in earth, formed hugest caves,
The roofs upshored with timber, strong to bear,
The superincumbent weight of sun-dried brick,
Wherewith the city's sons had strengthened her,
Fashioning her giant walls, well fenced with towers.
Then stored men the hollow vaults with wood,
Resinous gums, and things combustible,
Whereby wood-fuel wins to sudden blaze.

Also, at intervals, high hills of earth
They raised, fronting the ramparts. So the day
Came when King Arvan's eyes, though loath to see,
Perceived well the peril of the town,
And took thought for her profit. Then he called,
Ere on the council stone he sat, the chief
Of all his warriors to the palace hall,
Wherein he dwelt. So, sitting on his throne,
He communed with them, while the chieftains stood
And hearkened to the utterance of his voice.

Then spake King Arvan, using sober words :
" Chieftains ! the gods who rule all mortal lives,
Standing upon the dark-blue vault of heaven,
Have looked upon me, showing me a thought.
Yet ere I tell it, speaking in your ears,

Need is there that our judgment should go forth
Against a captive prisoned in our cells,
Since my soul showeth me that this is meet."

Then to the guards who waited round the door
He cried : "Hasten to the dungeon cells,
Bring hither with all speed Chavah the queen,
And set her, chained with chains, before my face.

So the guard went forth on their ambassage ;
While the great chiefs sat round the palace-room,
Speaking no word, and all the air was still.

Few moments passed—the quiet was destroyed.
A clank of arms along the corridor
Resounded, and the doors reopened wide ;
Then the war-weaponed men returned. Their hands
Led—chained with chains, as men lead a wild beast,
Fearing its flight, or blow from its fierce strength—
Chavah the queen, honouring King Arvan's word,
And set her over against the royal throne.—

So Arvan and the chiefs looked on her face.
Pale was it with great paleness ; for the dank,
Dim air of her captivity had slain
The ruddy colour of her cheeks. Her eyes
Had also lost their splendour ; for the night
Of the black dungeon had eclipsed their fire ;
Nor might they, being weak, unflinching face
The white light of the sun-cheered courts of day.
Yet fearless stood she in her hour of need,
Not crushed in heart by her captivity,
Nor 'whelmed by the near prospect of sharp death,
But queenly as of old ; and on the king
Looked haughtily, she fearing not a whit.

On her the king, with answering regard,

Gazed long unflinching, for his soul was full
With memories of the departed days—
Of all the evil that her hands had wrought,
And of the love wherewith she had been loved.

Now through his life, Arvan, the warrior king,
Had eyes of fire, whose penetrating gaze
Men faced unwillingly. All eyelids drooped,
When on the face dwelt his fierce gaze of flame.
But when he looked on Chavah, her dark eyes
Ever met his unshrinking. Even so now
She faced his glance with eyes that quailèd not.

Then Arvan to his chosen warriors spake :
“ Warriors, behold this woman. She, of old,
Was but a slave, of myriad women one,
Given by the chance of war unto our will,
Dragged with chained hands into captivity.
Then had she served, a slave, throughout her days,
Wearying away her hours in hopeless toil,
Doomed to the lash for each neglected task,
Yielding her lord delight with loathing heart ;
But I looked on her in her deep distress.
I looked, I pitied her in that great need ;
And my huge power, conspiring with my love,
Raised her, heart-humbled, from defiling dust,
Crownèd her queen, and set her by my throne.
Trusted she was with an exceeding faith,
That could not in her words discover guile ;
For, on her, gifts had, with unsparing hand,
Been largely heaped. How might man dream deceit,
Answering my favour with ingratitude.
Thus was she honoured, trusted, raised up,
Even from a slave's estate to a queen's throne ;

Yet she conspired against me. She hath slain
Athreh, the queen, arming against her life
My hand in hatred, through her evil plots.
Also, I sleeping, she with ready hands,
Untrue, stole from my slumber-couch the sword—
A theft whereby I had great pain of heart.
More hath she wrought of evil. In the days,
When the great war raged by the Western stream,
She, heartened by my absence unto crime,
Arose against me, burning my fair home
With wasting flame, smiting to death my wives
And my bright children. Also Rhaon's gates
She, being rebellious, kept against her lord ;
Through which, her sin, much blood of men was spilt.
Now standeth she before you. On her head
The guilt of many days rests, unremoved
By sorrowing word, acknowledger of wrong.
Therefore, considering justly, speak her doom."

Then spake the chieftains, answering with one voice :
" Chavah hath sinned greatly, earning death.

Now let our swords avenge on her thy wrongs,
Spilling her red blood on the thirsty earth ! "

They spake ; and, speaking, with the word arose ;
Whilst from each scabbard leapt the eager sword,
Keen, glittering, greedy for the feast of death.

Them Chavah looked on with unchanging eyes,
And a slight smile of scorn throned on her lips.

" Thy slaves," she said, " love blood, even like their
lord.

Command them. Chavah sueth not for grace.

Thee she despiseth, and thy murderous swords."

And Arvan spake : " Is not their doom-word just

For great the load of crime upon thy soul.
Yet now seek thou to mercy. Even yet
My heart, repenting, may forgive thy guilt."

Chavah replied—"I will not sue for peace
To him who is my foe. Use thou thy might.
I grieve not for the wrought, but unwrought ill."

He answered—"Oh, thou flinty-hard of heart!
Hast thou no thought of all my mercy shown?
Of all my gifts of love in former days?
No sorrow-word for all the innocent blood,
Poured forth upon the hearth-stones of thy home,
Through cruelty of thy relentless hands?"

Then Chavah said: "A tyrant's idle gifts,
Given for self-pleasing, have no power to win
Heart-gratitude, as have the gifts of love.
Thou! speakest thou of mercy—thou to me?
Had'st thou compassion, who, in hateful pride,
Gav'st me to drink from mine own father's skull?"

Then Arvan spake—"In the long-vanished days,
When thy sire warred upon me, slaying men,
Ere that he sought to strife, he vowed a vow,
That, having o'ercome me, he would drag my corpse,
Chained to his battle-chariot's iron wheels,
Even through the high-ways of my royal town.
Therefore I slew him captured, as was just.
But for this deed, which thou hast shaped in words,
Was it not done, when, glad through victory,
My heart grew hot with worship of the vine.
Light is the guilt of wine-compellèd deed;
Since the heart looketh not to sober guilt.
Therefore bethink thee, Chavah. Thou dost hold
Firmly the memory of an ancient wrong,

Avenging it by shedding of much blood,
Ill deeds I may not count for multitude.
Remembrance hast thou none of kindlier acts,
Wherewith, thou, being a captive, wast made glad ;
No answering recompence hast thou for these,
Who hast with manifold wrong those overpaid ?
Consider, in this world of warrior men,
Where swords smite fiercely ; and from day to day
Each man with edged steel protects his life,
Slight guilt it is, if in the heat of blood
Men strike o'erstrongly ; for the fire of strife
Maddens them past all sight of mercy's bounds.
Is it well done, when one sharp deed of blood,
Wrought out in battle hours, begets a flame
Unsleeping, never sated of revenge ?
Surely such ire would scorch away earth's life,
If nurst in other hearts as in thine own."

She answered—"If the deed, even as thou say'st,
Had been wrought out in pride of battle hours,
Yet were it just in me to hate thee well,
Who, even then, would'st wear upon thy hands,
The accusing stain of mine own kindred's blood,
Which not the river-waters of the land,
Nor heaven's winter rains of many years,
Might wash away, so that I should not see.
Thus had it been, if thou in strife had'st slain
Him, who through blood was linked unto my life ;
But thou in other guise did'st slay my sire.
Nor only this, me in my pain of heart
Thou mocked'st coldly with thy cruel mirth,
Polluting my pure lips with that dread cup,
Whereof I, quaffing, drank deep draughts of pain.

Know therefore, I consider not thy word ;
For I will hate thee faithfully till death."

Then Arvan, seeing that she would not bend,
Nor change, repenting of her former thought ;
Turning from her, spake to his chiefs again :
" Chavah repenteth not, nor seeketh grace.
What shall be done unto her ?" And the chiefs
Stretched forth their swords, and answered with one
voice—

" Oh, king ! let us destroy her where she stands ;
So shall her evil life cease from the earth."

Then Arvan spake— " Shed ye no drop of blood
That flows in Chavah's veins. She, though my foe,
Is but the slave of the immortal gods,
Fulfilling in her fury their desire.
Ill would it be, did I chastise in her
Obedience to their will. Let her depart,
Having rich store of all desired things ;
She hath sinned more than ever woman could,
Unaided by the unseen lords of earth.
Yea ! though in earlier days, while my great power
Stood 'stablished as the White Sea's granite cliffs,
I doomed her to swift death, she having sinned ;
Yet was it not for that she sought my life,
Since many men have sought it with the sword,
Openly in the battle, whom I spared,
Having o'ercome them ; for my heart is large,
Laughing at wounds, and the black night of death,
Which things all common men regard with fear ;
But not through fear did I adjudge her doom,
But for transgression of the Northland's laws,
Which men, despising, are not free from guilt.

Now hath she sinned against me, once again,
More grievously, yet hence shall she go free.
It is a crime against my life alone ;
Seeing the kingdom's laws are loosened now
By the great pressure of these evil times,
So that not even the meanest reverence them.
When the law's strength decays slaves will rebel,
Seeking their freedom. She is but a slave,
Desiring that which was her own of old.
I also am a king, and may forgive,
Where a just law forgives not. Let her pass."

But Chavah stood, with a low sunken head,
Bowed with much shame, before the mighty king,
Saying repentant words : " My soul is shamed.
For thou hast pardoned me, who am thy foe,
Giving me good gifts, when I sought thy life.
I never stooped my head before to man ;
Nor deemed I in the hot days of my youth
That I should, living, hear thy pardoning words,
Or think of thee with aught save extreme hate.
But thou art nobler, Arvan, in thy fall,
Than when the crown of earth was on thy brow,
And in thy hands the sceptre. My revenge
Had been to me, sweet as the feasts of gods,
Even in torments a great joy of heart,
Had'st thou forgiven me not. Thou hast forgiven,
And my soul's strength is shattered. What false god,
Or evil demon, planted in thy heart
This merciless mercy ? Hearken unto me.
Have I not wrecked thy more than kingly power,
Laid waste thy palaces with eating fire,
And slain thy children with the well-ground sword ?

Why should'st thou spare my life, who hate thee well,
Loading me with all store of costly gifts,
And adding pleasant freedom to thy slave ?
Oh ! Arvan, be as in the days of old,
Warrior-like, cruel, prone to deeds of blood,
That I may hate thee still. Pardon me not.
Have I not sinned against thee with the strength
Of all my heart ? Oh ! Arvan, spare me not,
But draw thy glaive. Avenge thy fame's defeat,
Thy kingdom overthrown, thy slaughtered sons,
Spilling fair Chavah's life-blood on the earth."

And Arvan said : " Be the thought far from me.
Chavah, thou art my foe, hating me much ;
And hast prevailed against me. In the days
Which have departed from me, when my soul
Was hot with battle-fire, thou had'st not lived
To boast thy triumph. But the veil of earth
Hath fallen from me, and my warrior feet
Are on the threshold of that other world,
Where falls no shadow from departed days.
There shall I shun the sorrow of my soul,
Escaping from all evils. Therefore live.
Thou in thy vengeance, bitter overmuch,
Wast but the servant of the immortal ones,
Fulfilling in thine anger their dread will.
Not by thy hand, but theirs, am I o'erthrown ;
For they desired to prove my strength of heart,
Knowing my strength of hand, willing to learn
If it were possible to crush my soul,
Which nought can conquer, for its might is great.
Thou then depart in peace. Seek thou thy clime,
Bearing rich gifts and precious. Thou hast been

To me a foe, endeavouring my harm,
But the great Sun ruleth supreme in heaven,
The star-gods are above all earthly lives ;
And men should reverence their servants still,
Whether they bring them evil gifts or fair."

So Arvan spake unto his warrior-men,
Faithful, who yet obeyed their king's command,
That they should give into Queen Chavah's hands
Rich gifts and fair, all that a queen might crave,
And bring her surely guarded to her land.
This then they also did, and brought her home,
Guarding her safely through the desert wilds,
Till her eyes, hungry with the dearth of years,
Looked once more on the mountains of her land,
Desired long with passionatest love.

But Chavah having won with patient toil,
And prudent care, and courage all divine,
The prize of her endeavouring, pined at heart.
For even as one who heaps upon a flame
Wood fuel overmuch, stifling the fire
With that designed to nourish ; even so she
Had sated her fierce vengeance to the full ;
It died, her aim accomplished. The great king,
Her mortal foe, while in his pride of place,
Whom she had hated with all strength of heart,
Fallen from his power, unto her soul grew dear,
So that regrets were clustered round his name,
As round a friend's. Her life grew objectless.
Something was wanting in her inmost heart ;
For sated hate, even like sated love,
Being a master-passion of the soul,
Leaves the heart hungerless. Thus though she lived,

Existence was a weariness. She pined
For the cool quiet of the passionless grave,
As once for her own country. So the years
Closed greyly round her, as the autumn mists
Close round some wildered wanderer on the hills,
Upswallowing slowly her remaining life.

CANTO XXII.

KING ARVAN sat upon the council-stone,
The rock of basalt, in the former times,
Hewn from the black-browed cliff, that o'er the brine
With cloud-helmed head watches the Northern sky.
Around him were the chiefs whom red-tressed war,
Consumer of the sons of men, had spared ;
Survivors of the slaughter in the West,
And the unblest retreat o'er wintry wilds ;
Irach, great lord of lands, sword of the host,
Ervar the fair, Khala and Rohn and Bar,
Elvan, sure drawer of the clanging bow,
Noak and Ahr, quick slingers of the stone,
Gylar, and Mor, and Arar of the sword,
Oran and Odan, slaughterers of men,
Black-armoured Isli, Goran of the isle,
Moran the white haired, ancientest of men,
Bor, the grey leader of the brass-beaked ships,
And many other chiefs less known to fame,
Whereof no record sure remaineth now,
Though named of men's lips in those days remote,
For mighty deeds, such as men work not yet.
These all sat, sitting on their oaken thrones,
Ranged round the ample dark-roofed council hall.

Then spake King Arvan, using sober words :

“ Chieftains, the gods who rule all mortal lives,
Standing upon the dark-blue vault of heaven,
Have looked upon me, showing me a thought.
Hearken, for I will tell you words of truth.
‘ In the dim stillness, ere sleep-giving night
Turned from the earth her dusky-sandalled feet,
While the fair day that now delights our eyes
Yet tarried in the halls of supreme Ur,
Feasting at the high table of the gods,
Ere yet he issued forth a joy to men,
A dream came to me, sent of the bright Sun,
Who, pitying the Northland, rules in heaven,
Methought I stood upon the ocean beach,
Where the great river Rha rests, in its strength,
Upon the heaving bosom of the main.
There saw I all the wave thronged with black ships,
Far as the eye could reach to the world’s edge,
And as I, greatly wondering, gazed on them,
Last of the ocean travellers, down the stream,
A great bark glided past me to the sea.
There stood a man high on the painted poop,
’Twas thou, oh ! Irach, lord of many men.
Upon thy head was set the royal crown,
And in thy hand the sceptre. Widely flowed
From thy great shoulders, in abounding folds
Of ruddy light, thick sown with golden gleams,
Th’ imperial mantle. And a voice from heaven
Declared, ‘ Irach is monarch of the North.’
Then cried I, deeming thou didst flee away,
Leaving the city in her saddest need,
‘ Oh ! Irach, whither o’er the watery waste
Bendest thou flying sails ? Wilt thou forsake

The royal city in her sore distress ?'
Then didst thou answer gravely, 'Loved of heaven,
I go unto the island of the North.
So the bright Sun commandeth, and the stars.
But thou remainest.' Then upon my sight
Glared red an awful light of many fires ;
And, turning, I beheld the imperial town,
Even Rhaon, tossing, like a troubled sea,
Great waves of flame unto the lurid sky,
In general conflagration. Then my grief
Grew into one great cry of extreme pain,
Beholding her destruction, whom I loved.
Thereon I op'd my eyes, and lo ! the night
Was round me ; and the winged form had fled.
Now therefore, chiefs, I deem the mighty gods
Have from the future drawn the covering veil,
Revealing hidden things. Thou shalt be king,
Oh ! Irach, in the days that are to be.
But the great city's homes shall be destroyed.
I, too, must perish. On the Northern isle
Shall the realm 'stablish yet again her strength,
Arising unto fairer life once more.
This, then, shall be in days that are to dawn ;
But now it is within my heart to strive
Kingly upon the field. I ne'er have stayed,
Hedged with stone walls, like an all-timid girl,
When the foe sought to look upon my face.
Let us go forth unto the play of swords,
And prove the fate of war once more again."

Him answered Irach, with restraining words :
"My liege, oh ! king, yet pause. Thou art o'erworn
With loss of blood, and fevers, and much pain.

Thou art not strong, as in the days of old,
When thy one sword scattered an host of men."
"Not strong to strike, but strong enough to die.
Bring me my sword. I perish, waiting here.
My heart consumes me, yearning for the field.
Lo! tarrying here, 'twill slay me where I stand ;
For that it hateth sloth, yet being brave."

And Irach spake anew: "But still awhile
Tarry ere thou dost arm thee for the strife ;
So doing, thou shalt wage a worthier war—
Yea ! conquer, if the gods decree success."

Then Arar of the sword arose, and said.
Now Arar was much honoured of the North ;
For, in the battle by the Western stream,
He, last of all men on the well-stained field,
Retreating, held the bridge against the West—
The bridge that led into the wave-girt isle.
Alone he held it, with his well-ground sword
Smiting through iron helmets and shields of hide.
The warrior-men before him lay in heaps,
Like brushwood, which some peasant in the woods,
Against the icy needs of winter time,
With broad hooked knife hath cut, strewing the earth.
But when King Arvan's men had fired the bridge,
Barring the forward pathway to the foe,
He, having plunged into the turbid stream,
Thence snatched by the quick hands of rowing men,
Was brought, sore wounded, to the river isle.
Therefore he was much honoured of the land,
And the great king spake with him as a friend.
Thus then said Arar, showing them his mind :
"Irach, withhold not Arvan from the strife ;

For that the gods have spoken to his soul :

Also his heart is 'stablished in his breast."

Thus Arar spake ; and all the chiefs who sat
Around the council table held their peace,
Nor uttered words dissuasive with their lips.
For, in their thoughts, they knew King Arvan's soul
Was set on strife, desirous of new war.

Then brought they to the king, at his command,
His battle-sword, and armour, and his steed ;
While the great chiefs went forth, assembling men,
Even all who yet remained, to lift the shield—
Scant in array compared with ancient days,
Yet still a multitude surpassing thought,
Hardened in frequent conflict, mighty men,
Strong lifters of the sword, who feared not strife,
Nor the great shock of shields, nor white-faced death.
These all stood armed in the sacred square,
The Sun's great plain, facing the blackened walls,
The widespread desolation of the wreck,
The home of Arvan in the former times.

Then rode the war-king through his palace gate
To meet the soldiers, gathered at his word ;
And riding, slowly drew nigh their array.
But where he came, all silent stood the ranks.
No soldier cry arose, demanding strife ;
The warriors seeing him forbore to cheer,
Being too pained at heart to raise the shout ;
The large tears coursed adown the warmen's cheeks,
Beholding him, who, in the former days,
Had been a tower of strength to lesser men,
When like a whirlwind swept the strife storm by
All pale, discrownèd of his warrior pride,

His strong arms hanging down, with feebleness
Wholly unnerved, reft of their battle might,
And his brave head by wounds, and grief abased.
Then gnashèd they their teeth, and swore an oath,
That he should yet look on a conquered field,
Or that their life's sun should in blood expire.

And Arvan spake, full hollow was the voice,
For past away was its tempestuous strength,
Since o'ermuch pain had brought the great king low.
"Soldiers," he said, "the foe's insulting tread
Is on our threshold. Lo! their host lies camped
Before our stately city, our heart's home.
They trust to trample down our tower-set walls,
Knowing the gods have warred on our array,
Sending the blue plague through our city's ways,
Quencher of life, slaughterer of many men.
What! shall they mock us with their vaunting strength.
In olden days we faced yet greater odds,
Prevailing still, for the Sun gave us might.
So did we overcome earth's leaguèd hosts,
Though multitudinous their ordered lines,
As ridgèd waves upon a wind-swept sea?
Have we not yet brave hearts, and sharp steel swords,
Keen for the slaughter as in former times?
Let us go forth, and smite them to the ground."

There Arvan's soldiers raised an angry shout
Drawing with speed from out their iron sheaths
The greatly-sharpened swords, and lifting up
Their burnished shields, arming them for the fray.

So Arvan and his men came through the gates,
Arraying them for battle. To the right,
Down by the salt waves of the hoary sea,

Chief over thousands, Arar of the sword,
On his red steed, long-maned, fleet as a shaft
Launched from an eastern warrior's bow of horn,
Ruled o'er the war, ordering the lengthened ranks.

Upon the left, vested in crimson garb,
Heavy with gold, o'ersown with rings of steel,
That glittered starlike, shining as he moved,
With swaying of his body, Khala past
From host to host ; riding upon his barb,
Bright brown as is a beech-tree, when the cold
White frost of autumn, like a pallid faced,
Wise worker in the yellow gift of mines,
Who doth adorn the corslet of a king,
Inlays the dusky woods with gleams of gold.

Unfar from him, nigh to the central war,
Ervar, the fair, bestrode his eastern barb,
Tawny as Ari's wastes of sun-parched sands.
Armed was he in a corslet, shining white,
Fashioned of silver, drawn from the dark mines
Far on the rude Ur mountains' rugged flanks,
Bright as the armour worn of the great Moon,
When panoplied he traverses heaven's floor.
Thus like a god moved Ervar. Beautiful
Once more he shone ; for all the weariness
And travel-soils of those his wanderings
Had past from him, as, after hours of storm,
A cloud rolls up from a far mountain side,
And leaves its silver glory plain to men.

Thus to the North and South lay ranged the war.
But in the centre, Irach and the king
'Stablished their strength. Irach upon his steed
Fire-red, sleek-skinned, that from the much champed bit

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Even his guard, on many fields of strife
Proved, nor found wanting. Each in his right hand
Brandished the spear, bright-tipped with shining steel ;
Each in his left hand raised the shield of wood,
Hide-covered, plated well with iron plates,
Sure shelter in the strife from hail of shafts.
Clanged on their steel-mailed thighs the ponderous
sword,

Weighty, that men of war alone might wield,
Even in those days : men that we see not now,
We being weak children of a feebler time.

Thus stood the battle of the Northern men,
Ranged with its thousands, lifters of the shield.

But over against them Emeth's armies lay,
Stretching for many leagues o'er hill and dale,
Like to pine forests in the untilled lands.
Far on the right, down by the reedy marsh,
The archer hosts made ready their sure bows,
And chose them barbèd shafts with prudent care,
Fitting the smooth notch to the sounding string.
Them Zamoth led, chief o'er five myriad men,
Wise to command, nor ruled of wrath or fear ;
But steadfast in the battle, in his power
Holding his soul, unmoved by ill-events.
He, on his fleet horse, gray, as a pale sky
At early dawn, mottled with many clouds,
Girt by ten thousand archer-men on barbs,
All skilled with shafts to wage unerring war,
Ruled the long lines nigh to the central host,
Where Emeth stood, and with him valiant men.

Here the West king had greatly strengthened him,
Massing the armèd men, lifters of spears,

By hundreds and by thousands ; till the land
Showed for long miles storm-dark with iron shields,
Like a dark sea that mirrors a dark sky.
Thus hedged with walls of iron, Emeth stood,
Prudent, not loving strife, willing in war
To shelter him from adverse circumstance.
With him were many chiefs, well skilled to guide
The storm of strife, hurling it on the foe ;
Esril and Emmor, Sesthel of the lance,
Accoz and Talmon, Acub, Isdael,
Nasith and Adin, Astath, Eanes ;
Ruach the sworded, captain of the guard ;
Bela, strong wielder of the battle-mace—
These all were leaders of the central war,
Guarding with iron shields and swords the West.

But to the king's left, on the horizon's edge,
Down by the pebbled ridge of the salt sea,
Opposed to Arar and his men of might
Stood Nar and Hod. This on his iron car
Scythe-set, high raised above the fighting men,
With his long spear smote down the shielded ranks.
But Hod afoot urged on the deadly war ;
Nor shield had he, nor corslet of fine brass
Wherein he trusted ; but with his two hands
Whirling on high his sword of sharpened steel,
He smote himself a pathway through the foe.
These then beside the sea maintained the war.

Now when the chieftain, Arar of the sword,
Perceived Nar and Hod, how that they came
With many men, all lifters of the shield,
Down by the salt waves of the hoarse-voiced sea,
His wrath was great within his hairy breast.

Then to his men he cried—"Set on with speed !
Look ye on Nar and Hod. Have they not said
Within their vain hearts, vaunting overmuch,
' We will tread down the Northmen with all ease,
And drive the remnant flying from the plains
Even as sheep before some barking dog ?'
Therefore be valiant !—strike like men of war !
Be brave, and do great deeds worthy of fame !
Nursed of the North ! know, Rhaon's walls behold."

Thus spake the chieftain. And the trumpets blew,
Screaming like eagles for the flesh of men ;
While a great shout rang down th' embattled lines,
Even to the central hosts, where fought the kings.
Then knew they that the war-play had begun.

So Arar and his men, as comes a tide
Swelled of the North wind to the Northern shore,
Came mightily in strength. And Nar and Hod,
With all their warmen, bending to the charge,
As bends a gossamer web when blows the breeze,
Gave ground apace, fearing the Northern might.
Thus on the Northern right by the salt waves,
Where on the grey, much-pebbled beach they pour
Continuous, in the glory of their strength,
Much war had place, and valiant deeds were wrought,
Adorned with frequent deaths of stalwart men.
For Arar mightily maintained the strife,
Leader in war ; going before his men,
Nor sparing of his body in the fray.

He then, contending greatly with the sword,
Struck a deep gap through the thronged Western ranks,
And many men, prevailing, he o'erthrew.

Therefore rose Nar against him, hot with rage,

Viewing the pouring forth of Western blood
By Arar's wasteful sword—he therefore cried,
Speaking with a great voice, exceeding strong,
So that the cry rose o'er the battle roar
Like thunder o'er the bleatings of a fold,
“Destroyer! hold thine hand. Behold I come,
Even Nar, a worthy foe. Now shalt thou mourn,
Spilling thy blood on the desirous earth.”

So Arar turned; and looked upon his foe,
Where through the war-waves slowly he toiled on,
To see him in the face. He turned; and scorn
Flashed through his eyes, beneath his knitted brows,
Dark fire on Nar; while his sneer-curved lip,
Upheaving all its wealth of yellow hair,
Showed the grey gleam of the clenched teeth below.
Loud cried he therefore, answering Nar again:
“Warlike in speech! boaster with valiant words!
Cease from much talk, and lift the shining spear.
Soon shall the great gods give thee to my sword.”
Then the two chiefs drew nigh; and each with might
Smote at the other. Nar, with steel-tipped spear,
Struck Arar on the breast; but the sharp head
Glanced harmless from the iron-fenced breast.
And Arar struck, cleaving Nar's ample shield,
Hide-fenced, iron-plated, with one blow;
And pierced the fencings of his shoulder-blade,
So that the blood flowed in a gushing stream.
Then Nar sank, fainting, on the chariot floor;
But the quick driver turned his fervent wheels,
And fled wind-swift out of the adverse fray.
Thus Nar was overthrown of Arar's sword.
But Arar, having conquered, with great wrath

Raged, like devouring flame among the corn,
More fiercely wasting lives of warrior men,
Till the West slow retreated, fearing death.

Thus o'er the plains Arar and all his men
Past on, destroying greatly, and prevailed.
But Nar had ambushed chariots, iron-wheeled,
Scythe-set, close-hidden by the pine-tree woods,
Which lay between him and King Emeth's war.
These when the Northern men pursuing past,
Nor heeded aught, save to tread down their foes,
Rushed sudden through their ranks, as a sea-beast,
Black-threatening, mighty with white, gleaming teeth,
Strikes through a frightened shoal of timorous fish.
Then the new levies, being filled with fear,
Having seen little of manslaying war,
Fled all discomfited, leaving a gap
In the great army's flank. In one huge crowd,
They hurried, panic-stricken, towards the gates,
Like scattered leaves, chased of the northern wind;
Nor Arar's shout availed to stay their flight;
Nor Arar's sword; though, slaughtering many men,
He strove to stay the fliers' stormy tides
By the strong might of an opposing fear.
Yet nought prevailed; for their dread was great,
And spurred them from the field to Rhaon's gates,
Hopeful of pleasant shelter from the foe.
Arar caught also in the whirling waves
Of the wild flight, helpless was swept away,
Even as a black bull, by a flooded stream
Caught unawares, is hurried down the tide,
Vain-struggling, bellowing greatly as he goes.

Now, in the central host, Irach, the chief,

Even as we die, when pierced of the sharp steel.
Up then ! be brave, and smite them. Stand no more
Battering upon great Rhaon's brazen gates,
Demanding shameful shelter. Be not like
To timorous children in the city ways,
Scared by the black looks of a drunken man,
That fly with quaking hearts, and fear-urged feet,
And beat with slight hands on their parents' doors,
Imploring safety. What ! are ye not men,
Bearded—not children ? Quit you, then, as men.
Wash from your lives the shame of this your flight
In hostile blood. Be brave ! Behold your foe !
Have ye not fled from wind ? See now their place
On the red battle-plain. Where—where are they ?
Lo ! Irach's mighty sword hath overthrown
The host, that vexed you with their scythèd cars.
They fly before him, even as timorous hares
Fly from the fierce rush of a grim, gaunt hound."

Then Arar's soldiers, hearkening to his words,
Turning, considered. Shame possessed their souls ;
For that they knew themselves now unpursued.
So with great clamour, lifting up their shields,
They looked once more on battle. Every heart
Was strong within each breast, they meaning in blood
To wash out the remembrance of their shame.
Thus was the battle on the right restored,
Down by the salt waves of the hoarse-voiced sea,
By Irach's might, and Arar's warrior sword.

Meanwhile, upon the left, a host of men,
Rangèd in bands, spread like well-ordered clouds,
Dusky, that the fresh wind marshalls in heaven,
At eventide, after the set of sun,

Made war upon the Northmen with their hands.
Warriors were these, slingers of smooth, round stones,
Well skilled to aim, much dreaded of the foe ;
For hard it was to shun the invisible death
Flung by their sure hands on the hostile line.
And as a cloud, in the cold spring-tide hours,
Slings, from its hidden depths, the hailstones forth
Against the blossomed pride of wholesome trees,
Bearers of fruit, and wastes their hopeful bloom,
Smiting their glory to the dusty earth,
Thus the dark slinger-cloud of many men
Prevailed, with careful rage, to overthrow,
Beneath the pebble storm, the bannered pomp,
Fair threatening, of the foemen's wide array.
Thus, then, they warred on Ervar and his men,
And smote them with the unseen hail of stones.

Then Ervar, being grieved with many deaths
That had oppressed his warriors, to them cried :
“ Let the steel answer to these peasant stones,
Wherewith they pelt our warmen to the death.
What ! do they scorn, that they should use us thus ?
Out with your swords, and show them we are men ! ”

So, with great swiftness running o'er the plains,
Ervar and all his men, with ready swords,
Fell on the slingers, slaying them with speed.
And these, being defenceless, turned to fly,
Then had they soon been trampled in the mire,
But at the instant Arom and his hosts,
Black-mailed, iron-shielded, with great wrath
Fell upon Ervar's men, where far advanced
They to the West showed their unshielded flank.
Then was their dense array swift pierced through,

And many men fell, suddenly struck down,
Smitten to death ; while their dejected souls,
Orphaned of glory and the light of day,
Were hurled to darkness by swift-smiting swords.
For Arom's might prevailed, till through the crowd
Of fighting men he pierced the central throng,
Where Ervar rode, clad in his silver mail.
He saw ; he knew him ; and his wrath arose,
So that the black blood bubbled in his heart,
Like black broth in a cauldron on the fire.
For he had pitied Mawrawh for her fate ;
Also great love had come into his heart,
Beholding her, how that she bravely died.

Then crièd he, with a great cry of words :
“ Turn, Ervar, the false-hearted ! thou, through whom
Mawrawh the princess died the death of flame.
Turn now—defend thee. Lo ! thine hour is come ;
Nor shall thy fair face, nor thy artful words,
Skilled to subdue a woman's trusting heart,
And lure her to her doom, protect thee now.
Consider : in my hand I bear thy death.”
And Ervar, turning swift, beheld the face
Of Arom, the great fighter. Huge was he ;
Strong-armed as a great oak, that in the vale,
Ancient of years, spreads out on either side
Its strength of branches. In his broad right hand,
Clasped till the tense skin grew to marble white
With the great pressure, high in air he reared
His battle-hammer's iron-headed strength.
Strong as a rock showed his great breadth of chest ;
His head and wide-set shoulders o'er the crowd
Of lesser men rose like a stag's strong frame

O'er a slight company of feeble hinds.
So showed strong Arom, massive in his strength,
Like to the great god of the earlier days,
Who with large hand scooped from the hollowed plains
Rocks and much earth ; then piled the shapeless mass,
Framing the lasting ridges of the hills.
Yet not even for an instant Ervar shrank,
Avoiding conflict ; for his heart was brave,
Much scorning danger and the thought of death,
And urged him on to the unequal strife.
Therefore he flung his targe before his breast,
Orbed like a hollow bubble, silver-white,
As a round snow-patch on a green hill-side,
And spurred his red-brown steed over the dead,
To fight with Arom. And the battle-beast,
With his strong shoulders, smote impetuous way
Through the confused throng of fighting men ;
As through a yellow and tumultuous stream,
Tossing tempestuous with its thousand waves,
A tawny savage cleaves his rapid path.
But Ervar to his men cried as he past :
" Stand back, for I would strive with him alone."
So o'er the warring hosts, that of the prince
Or of great Arom ruled, contending much,
Long time had striven, while slow they drew aside,
Mute, waiting for the conflict's veiled event,
Sank silence as of death. So still it was,
Far to the right men heard the shock of arms,
And shouts of battle from the central war.
Thus stood the mighty war-chiefs, face to face.
Then Arom, raising up his hammer-hand,
And standing in his stirrups, fiercely smote

With his full strength at Ervar. And the prince,
Being wary, holding high his silver shield,
Broke the great strength of the descending stroke :
So the black hammer-head glanced harmless by.
But Arom, by the might of his own blow
Drawn forward, stooped his head. Then Ervar's sword
Struck on the iron-fencèd shoulder-blade,
And pierced it slightly, and the red blood flowed,
Staining the emerald garb with dull red dye.
Yet was the wound o'er-slight to close the strife ;
For the strong metal-plating turned the sword,
So that it only grazed the chieftain's flesh.
But Arom, angered by Prince Ervar's stroke,
Feeling the blood flow forth, rising in wrath,
Showered forth his heavy blows, more frequent fast
Than doth a smith, that, hammering with all strength,
Beats into thin plates the red iron bars,
Hot from the forge flame. But Prince Ervar stood,
Waiting his chance ; nor did he wink his eye,
Nor cause his steed to swerve an hairbreadth back,
Through terror of the heart. But craftily
He waged the battle, knowing life the prize.

Thus for a space they fought, and Ervar's sword
Had Arom grieved with twice-repeated wounds ;
Yet Ervar still was scatheless, for his skill
Shunned the great hammer ; so its iron strength
Glanced from the shield, or smote the empty air.
Yet haply Arom, in the dubious strife,
Had been crowned victor, being of greater strength ;
But the great gods withheld from him renown.
For, while he sheltered him from Ervar's strokes,
A javelin, hissing through the frightened air,

Flung by some wanton Western's treacherous hand,
Struck on the hammer arm, even while upraised
It sought to ward the blow. And the arm sank ;
While Ervar's sword smote on the unfenced head.
Instant the black night closed round Arom's eyes,
And, reeling back, straightway he fell to earth
With a great crash of arms. But Ervar paused,
Shaking his sword with a loud shout of joy.

Then Ervar's men, when they saw Arom fallen,
Were glad within their souls. With a great cry,
That pierced through all the foldings of the clouds,
Even to the throne of golden helmed Ur,
They set upon the foe ; and with one charge
Bore Arom's vanquished men from off the field
Five hundred paces. Then, of Arom's men,
Some, being affrighted, fled with headlong speed
To the near shelter of the branching woods.
Others were driven by the sharp Northern sword
Into the marsh, that, girdling all the plain,
Spread out its waving multitudes of reeds.
There, in the treacherous bog, oppressed with slime,
Thousands lay wallowing, rolled in inky mud,
Even like a company of hogs obscene,
That, in the courtyard of some peasant home,
Disport themselves, rejoicing much in filth.
But others, bolder hearted, flung their shields,
Broad-orbed before their breasts, and set their feet
Firm on the slippery ground, wet with much gore,
And clenched their swords, for that they thought to die.

So Ervar's troops prevailed against the foe,
Urged onward by the madness of their rage,
And drave them backward from the battle plain.

Thus to the right and left eddied the fray.
For the great gods seated serene in heaven
Aided now these, now those ; increasing strength,
Or 'minishing, even as they deemèd best.

But in the central hosts where fought the kings,
The battle, that raged fierce along the line,
Waxed mightiest. Like to a pine-wood fire
That brightly burns, cheering the limbs of men,
Much chilled through journeyings long through the
froze air ;

To right and left stretch out the free red flames,
But in the centre of the holy blaze,
More friendly shines the clear white core of heat.
Thus the great strife, where Arvan and his chiefs
Fought with their broad swords, beating down the foe,
Waxèd more vehement yet. The trumpets blew,
Cheering the soldiers' hearts to valiant deeds,
With clamorous cryings of their brazen throats.
So for a while raged the great battle storm
With unchecked fury, as in olden days,
When the North king o'erthrew earth's leaguèd hosts.
The Western ranks recoiled before the shock
Of the armed men who fought before the king,
For all the veterans struck like men of war,
Having seen battle, being undismayed.
They gave no foot-breadth backward in the fight
Through the long day, while yet their swords were keen,
Nor had lost edge, carving through casques of men.
Thus in tempestuous whirl went on the strife
Through many hours of death, till all the soil
Grew slippery with the heart's blood of brave men,
Wet as a banquet's chamber floor with wine,

When, at the feasting's close, bowls are upset
Of ruddy drink, by fierce carousing hands,
Unsteady through much worship of the vine.
And all the ground was cumbered with the slain,
As on high festival a palace floor
Is heaped with bodies of wine-drunken men.

Thus went the day, where Arvan and the chiefs
Fought side by side, keeping the foe at bay.
And, spite of tenfold odds and the charmed sword's
Potentest virtues, seemed it even now
That fate smiled favouring the Northern war.
But the great gods sitting on high in heaven
Otherwise willed the issue ; and no man
Prevails to change things 'stablished by their will.
So chanced it that towards the set of sun,
While the West wavered, Arvan the great king,
Urged by the fervent longing of his soul,
For that the stars, who rule the fates of men,
Had sent a fever fury to his heart,
Thrust himself through the dense array of foes,
Seeking a holy death, beloved of heaven.

Him Lygrul spied, and with a mighty hate
Hating him, for the sake of Chavah's face,
He sought to slay him ; crying with a voice
Exceeding loud on Arvan, taunting him :
" Oh ! Arvan ! Slaughterer of many men,
Now art thou vanquished also ; therefore yield."

Then the king, turning, looked, and to his soul
Came a great madness, seeing nigh at hand
Lygrul the traitor mocking at his fall.
Therefore he plunged his spurs deep in his steed ;
But Nur sprang forward through the battle throng,

Answering with swiftness to the monarch's will
Lygrul toiled also towards him through the press.
Then had they speedily met : but in the fray
Orar perceived the coming of the chief,
Orar the fair-haired, much beloved of men ;
And fearing for the king, knowing him weak,
Now also wearied with long hours of strife,
He sought to save him from impending doom.
So on his grey steed, piercing through the crowd,
He flung himself 'twixt Lygrul and the king,
And smote at Lygrul with his shining sword,
But the blade glanced from Lygrul's orbed shield.
Then Lygrul, rising, with his axe of war
Smote Orar on the helm, and the steel brake—
So the great blade clove Orar's skull in twain,
And from the steed he fell, dead earth to earth.

Thus perished Orar, dying for his lord,
Falling in youth, and little known to fame
Throughout life's days, yet winning in his death
Renown, fair shining as the clear-faced heaven.
For some men are as children, palace-born,
Rich from their birth with diadem of gold ;
But others late in life attain to fame,
Crowned on the grave's edge with their kingly crown ;
Like unto Autumn trees, that at the close
Of their green life, upon white Winter's brink
Assume their regal circlet of red gold.

Now Orar having fallen, Arvan the king,
And Lygrul met, each riding on his steed.
Then Arvan struck at Lygrul, with his heart,
While all his body's strength gathered itself
And passed into the blow ; as a wave's might,

When land is nigh, waxes as it doth rise,
Driven of the tempest-wind, till the great surge
Hurls its vast strength on the much-beaten shore.
But Arvan's strength was spent ; his arms were weak ;
And wrath against the traitor lent his heart,
But not his frame, the might that wins the fray.
So Lygrul, swerving warily aside,
Shunned the king's blow. He being overweak,
Exhausted with the long-protracted strife,
Recovered not for an eye-wink his guard ;
And ere he had regained it, Lygrul's axe,
Descending, clove the gold-adornèd helm,
And bit into the cavern of the brain.
There Arvan reeled back suddenly, and fell
Dead on the earth, which echoed to his fall.

Then from his steed Lygrul, with eager haste,
Sprang down, to seize on Arvan where he lay.
But when he saw his face, and knew him dead,
Shame seized him, having servèd him of old,
That for his hate's sake he had slain him thus ;
Also he stood for one brief instant still.
Even as he stood, doom came. For Isli sprang,
Black-armoured Isli, mighty in the war—
He sprang forth from the press with hasteful heart,
And smote at Lygrul, standing unawares.
Then Lygrul, stunned by the great mace of steel,
Sank senseless to the earth ; and all his men,
Seizing upon him, bore him from the strife,
Sore maimèd by the blow, but yet unslain.
Thereon came Esril with his battle-sword,
Seeking to smite down Isli of the Isles.
And all around them raged the throng of men ;

And in the centre of the war their strife
Went on unpausing. But King Arvan lay
Unconscious of their warfare, being dead.—

Thus perished Arvan, lord of many lands,
Uncaptured, unsubdued, his battle-brand
Clenched in his hand, striving to conquer Fate,
All vainly striving, though his heart was brave,
For the great gods immortal willed his fall.
He had been long a terror unto earth ;
As a fire-mountain from the ocean-breast,
Suddenly rising o'er the world of waves,
Towers, clad with terror : black its riven sides,
Scored by the earthquake-throes that gave it birth :
Fierce roll the lava-tides from its high crest,
Down to the briny tide that boils and foams,
Tormented by the hostile element.
Fear holds the finny nations of the sea ;
The ocean giants, armed in silver mail,
Fly, spurred by horror ; the brine-skimming ships
Haste with averted wings, even as a bird,
Escaped the fowler, shuns the fatal snare.
Thus rose King Arvan from the heart of Time
Over the world of men—a shape of fear
That struck chill terror into bravest hearts.
Long was his flaming life the thing on earth
That drew all the world's gaze ; but as days passed,
Men's hearts grown used, then gazed they calmer-eyed
On the portentous ocean-birth. Awhile
It shone a beacon-flame. Earth and the heavens
Showed brighter for its red tremendous glare.
Last came the night when it no more might shine ;
Men gazed, and it was not. The days flow on ;

But it hath passed away. Thus came the hour
To Arvan ; and his place knew him no more.
His soul went forth unto the mighty gods,
Th' Immortal Ones, whom he had fitly served,
Shedding much crimson blood, destroying men.
Meetest of all the race of mortal men
Was he to be companion of their joys,
Rejoicing much in slaughter, doing deeds
That steeped in sorrowing gloom the scourged earth.
Therefore throughout the ages, as a god
He sitteth in the Northern hall of heaven,
Drinking red draughts, and deep, of blood, to cheer
His heart divine with that he loved on earth :
Since blood on earth he loved passing well ;
And that which warriors shed whilst wearing flesh,
In the hereafter, to their disrobed souls
The just gods grant that they may quench their thirst,
Feasting thereon, for that they hold it sweet.
Such life leads Arvan in the halls of gods,
Far beyond mortal sight. But unto men,
He, when the cloudless night is o'er the world,
Shineth on high—that bright, unchanging star,
Which dwelleth nearest to the central heaven.
Seeing, on earth, his spirit greatly proved
By battle-toils and treachery and grief
Was constant ; therefore changeth he no more,
Shining on constant through revolving years.

Thus was it with the soul of the great king,
Instantly journeying to the gods' great hall.
But upon earth his body silent lay,
Slumbering amid the battle's awful roar.
Yet hotter waxed the conflict round the slain ;

Over the corpse the dead men frequent fell ;
And shields, and swords, and banners dropt by hands
Powerless through wounds, or iced through nearing
death,

Made a great burial-mound, fittest of tombs,
Till none could mark where the dead monarch lay.
Still Isli held at bay the swarming foe,
Whose numbers grew as every moment passed ;
As flies increase their swarms, on a hot noon,
Around some heated traveller's wayworn head.
But his great mace incessant 'mid the throng
Toiled on unsparing, beating out men's lives ;
Till Irach, fearing for King Arvan's life—
Since fallen was the banner of the king,
And the great golden helm shone out no more
Through wind-rents in the battle's lurid clouds—
Came through the eddying battle with his guard
Chosen, who followed him throughout the fray,
And charged upon the foe. There ebb'd again
The tide of strife—the conflict was restored ;
And the great Sun sank slowly from the heavens ;
But in the twilight gloom still raged the war,
And men smote on, scarce seeing whom they smote.

But Irach and his men yet held the plains,
Waiting the dark face of the moonless night.
For he had sent forth the swift sailing ships,
Having wise orders, when the night fell deep,
To set upon the foe with sudden fires,
Quenchless, forth-blazing from the heart of night,
And smite their rear with unexpected swords.

And the night came to the contending hosts.
She came with trailing garments, black as smoke,

That from a conquered town ascends to heaven,
When all her dwellings feed the god of flame.
So all obscure it was, that he who talked
Close with his neighbour, linking hand in hand,
Saw not the face of him with whom he spake.
Then did the Northmen rise against the foe ;
Sudden the red fire from the heart of night
Blazed forth, destroying ; as from out a cloud,
Black-bosomed, flashes forth the god's red dart,
Whilst all the heavens burn with the instant flame.
Scared rose the Westmen from their fated rest,
Wherein they rested on the battle plain,
Circled with flame, and smitten by the steel.
Even as a snake, torpid from winter's frost
That hath lain hidden in the matted heart
Of brushwood, heaped high on a chief's hearth,
Awaking, girt with fire, seeketh to fly ;
While many blows, from hands of serving men,
Gash his fair-shining skin with gaping wounds.

Thus whilst the shout of battle, and the flames,
Ruddy, upbursting upon every side,
Showed their swift progress through the affrighted
host,

The Northmen, led of Irach, in all haste
Arising, smote them suddenly again,
Uplifting instant the clear eastern fires,
Shining, that the broad ocean might not quench ;
So they prevailed greatly o'er their foes.
It was as though the swarthy-visaged gods,
Who rule the underworld where dead men dwell,
Lovers of base, unwarlike lives on earth,
Sudden had burst the earth-walls of their home,

And come forth armèd with the nether fires,
Wherewith they torture souls, to smite and slay.

Then Emeth's warmen seized with panic fear,
Cried out and fled. The fierce uncertain flames
Far-shining, sudden, bursting through the night
In thousand places, multiplied their dread.
Confusion fell upon their hearts. They saw
In every man a foe. So each man's hand
Was set against his fellow. Through the gloom
They shrieked, and ran, and smote in the wild flight,
Trampling men's lives out with each forward league,
O'er which their fear-filled feet hasted along.
Lastly the pale dawn, sent of the wise gods,
Came down to them, unveiling things that were,
Ruin and wreck, rejoicing o'er their host,
Confusion in the mingled multitude,
Half armed, still maddened, breathless with the flight ;
White fear on every face ; in every eye
The terror of defeat ; unspoken dread
On every lip, horror of coming fate.
Shamèd they stood, for, by the gleaming light,
They knew the host's disgrace, war-honour lost.
For they were flying from an unseen foe.
No hostile banners met their fearful gaze ;
No swords save their own falchions shone to slay.
For, long ere then, the searchers, searching well
Amid the wreck of arms and fallen men,
Had found the corpse of Arvan, the great king,
And sheltered them within the city walls.

CANTO XXIII.

THE white Moon, god of death, considering men,
With awful face sat in the purple sky ;
For he, through the still night, while, wrapt in sleep,
All the earth's sons forget day's weary toil,
Judgeth the slumbering nations ; on his throne
Of bleached ivory sitting silently,
Dividing dooms, allotting deaths to men.
And, as was meet, beneath the death-god's gaze
The labouring war-men raised the mighty pyre,
Arvan, the dead king's latest throne on earth.
Thus was it fashioned :—First, in order meet
Where Arvan's royal palace late had stood,
They ranged great blocks of marble, various hues ;
Forming the base. Then o'er it piled high
All odour-breathing wood ; cedar or spice,
Or scented gum trees from the southern land,
Frankincense also from the eastern world.
Before the basement of the wood-framed mount
The labourers, deep in earth slow mining on,
Fashioned a cave, fit sleep-room for the dead,
Then walled, and vaulted it, with exact care,
Using rough granite blocks, brought from the wreck
Of Arvan's palace, for his sepulchre.

Thus toiled the toilers through the moonlit night,
And through the following days ; but when the moon

Upon the seventh night from his high throne
Considered earth, accomplished was the task, .
And the great tomb looked for its royal guest.

Then Sidroc sent to Irach messengers
With message-words, showing to him the truth.
“ Lo ! I have raised the pyre. The room of death
Awaits its kingly tenant. Therefore come
Thou and thine armed men, honouring the king.”

These words heard Irach when the pearly dawn,
First daughter of the Sun god, from the heavens
Came down to earth, awakening drowsy men.
But when the fiery heralds of the Sun
Trod the steep paths of heaven, showing to earth
The approaching footsteps of the mighty One,
Then Irach and his men before the gates
Of the Sun's temple waited silently
Till the great god should with approving eyes
Look down propitious on the funeral rites.

He came, the bright one, filling all the sky
With glorious light, o'ercoming every shade,
Chasing the gloom-kings to the under-world ;
On every face reflected gleamed the smile,
Propitious, of his goodly countenance.
Then all the warriors clashed their brazen shields,
Hailing with cheerful shouts the glorious god ;
But Irach climbed the steep steps of the fane,
With sheathed falchion in his sinewy hand,
And stood before the brazen gates alone,
On the brass-fenced door he struck three times
With the great war-sword. Far over the square
Rang the strong blows ; and in the inmost shrine
Reverberating clamours echoed round.

Then from the temple, when the tumult ceased,
Sounded a deep voice, uttering asking words :

“What man is he who on the brazen gates
Of the great Sun, striking with sword of war,
Disturbs the quiet of his holy fane !”

And Irach answered to the questioning voice :
“Irach the chief is here, he and his men.”

Then the voice spake again : “What seeks the chief
That his sword strikes against the brazen gate ?”

But Irach answered : “He doth seek the king,
Arvan the dead, since for the funeral pyre
Of costliest woods, he hath brought many gifts,
That he may do him fitting reverence.”

Him answered the deep voice : “The chief did
well,
Honouring the dead king, friend of the great Sun,
Therefore the high god leadeth forth his guest,
To look propitious on the pomp prepared.”

The voice ceased, and forthwith the brazen gates
Of the Sun's temple opened with a clang,
Showing white-bearded Sidroc, the high priest,
Standing upon the threshold, and the priests,
Black-garbed beside him—dust upon their heads,
And every visage with black stains defaced,
In sign of lamentation. Round the bier
They stood, some with stript arms, ready to bear
Arvan, the dead king, to his funeral pyre ;
Others with instruments of uncouth shape,
Prepared to raise the tones of funeral wail,
Whilst the great chorus, many-voiced, around,
Howled forth their grief, honouring the mighty dead.

Then down the temple steps, towards the pyre,

The long procession moved. First came a band
Of fair-haired children, raising shrill lament,
While, in the intervals of dolorous sound,
They beat their little hands in plaintive guise,
And where they went their tear-drops to the ground
Fell, like great tear-drops from the rose-bright sky,
On a spring morn that seeth much of rain,
When, overcharged with treasures, the bright clouds
Let fall their crystal jewels to the earth.
And thus they wept, not heedful of the lost ;
Nor moved of pity shed they the clear dew
Of mourning tears, regretful for the dead,
But knowing well the custom of the land,
Which, at the burial of the king, gave o'er
The children mourners to the biting scourge,
That, sparing not, smote till the red blood ran.
For this men ever did when died a king,
Receiving from his people funeral rites,
That they who suffered, till with extreme age
The hair upon their brow grew silver-white,
Might be not all oblivious of the day.

These followed the Sun's virgins, stately shapes,
And fairest among women, whom the Sun,
Gazing upon from his high place in heaven,
Had gathered from the many-nationed world,
To be partakers of his glorious couch,
Blest sharers in his all divine delights ;
These, being brides of the all-shining Sun,
Were clad in other hours in fairest robes,
Gorgeously vested, as befitteth those
Who are the loved of the bright-tressèd Sun.
But now they moved, their splendour laid aside,

Such was the Sun's will, in sad mourning garbs
Of ashen hue, while with much-quivering hands
They rent their long loose hair, and smote their breast,
And shrieked the grief-shriek, honouring the dead.

Then rose the sad voice of the funeral chant,
With mournful tones troubling the morning air.
"Who cometh forth from the Sun's temple gates,
Lying in state upon his golden couch,
Girt with loud songs of grief, and grievous cries?
Arvan the king, the mighty Sun-god's friend.

Why honoureth the god a mortal born,
Whose tongue is mute, whose eyes can look no praise?
Cold lies he now; he ne'er shall worship more.
Is he not dead, the mighty Sun-god's friend?

Arvan was greatest of the earth-born kings:
He overthrew the nations, being strong.
He smote the earth: the earth was but his slave.
He who is mighty, is the Sun-god's friend.

Arvan was bravest of flesh-wearing men—
Braver than wild bull, monarch of the wood.
He feared no shaft, nor blow of gashing steel.
He who is brave, he is the Sun-god's friend.

Arvan was pious, honouring the Sun.
He served him greatly with the lives of men.
He gave him gifts, whole herds of shrieking slaves.
He who is pious, is the Sun-god's friend.

Arvan is dead. He perished, sword in hand.
He fell in battle by a worthy death.
His brow is cleft, cleft by the foeman's steel.
Who dies a brave death, is the Sun-god's friend.

Lament for Arvan, friend of the bright god.
Arvan is dead, great warrior of the North.

Arvan is dead ; he lifts no more the shield.

Arvan is dead ; snapt is the battle sword."

While the chant, sung by many thousand lips,
Rolled stormy music to the shining skies,
The priests upon the pyre placed the still corpse.
In his right hand they set the battle sword ;
Upon his breast the shield. So on the pile
He lay, with white face staring at the sky,
Where his brave spirit stood among the gods,
Waiting desirous for its comely garb
Of flesh fire-purged. For, by the law of gods,
Warriors at their high feastings sit not down,
Welcomed as honoured guests, save robed in flesh,
Wherewith they, clad, wrought out great deeds in war.
But when, avoiding the quick path of fire,
Their bodies, left upon the battle-plain,
Moulder through many days ere they are dust :
Their souls, restrained from their chief delight,
Find solace only clustering round the door
Of the gods' hall, dreaming of future feasts,
When to their soul the flesh has been re-given.

Now when the priests, descending, stood close ranged
Round the great pile of odour-breathing wood,
Irach stood forth before the multitude,
Speaking the praise-words, honouring the dead :
"Arvan is dead, mightiest of mortal kings.
Enduring was he, as beseems the brave,
Of battle toils : foremost in chase and war.
His mighty soul desired not delicate meats
Of feastings ; nor the palace's soft couch.
But he loved arduous enterprise, and sought
Chiefly where danger lurks his dread delight ;

For that his soul was kingly in its will,
Scorning the joy of feasts and silken rest.
He smote the mountain beast, in his first youth—
The mountain beast, tusked with white-shining bone—
The beast of giant size, huge as a rock
That towers high-lifted o'er the level plain.
He slew him, piercing through his iron hide ;
His javelin's thirsty point drank deep of gore.
The white bear by the strength of his right hand
He overcame. Mine eyes beheld the strife ;
For the king's charger, fearing much the beast,
Recoiling, fell. Then, freeing with great toil
His limbs, oppress'd by the fallen steed,
King Arvan rose. The savage of the wild
Upreared his deadly claws against his life,
So nigh unto him, on the monarch's cheek
Steamed the hot breath from out his gaping jaws.
Then he, unweaponed ; for the sword of chase
Was in the fall far-shaken from his grasp,
Smote with his dagger on the ice bear's head
Harder than iron mace smites warrior shield,
Stretching him with that buffet dead on earth.
Such was King Arvan, mighty in the chase.
Oh ! brothers of the sword ! Comrades in arms !
Why should I speak his fame, foremost in war,
When he arose against the sons of men ?
Where lies the realm that knoweth not his might ?
The arrow-darters of the utmost lands
Fled from before his face, o'er-filled with fear.
Swift flight was theirs over the desert earth ;
As dead leaves fled they, chased of autumn winds.
Still is his name to them a sound of fear ;

Their wives grow pale when men's lips shape the word ;
Even their young ones shiver, filled with dread.
Verily, Arvan was a mighty man.
He smote Ivora's chiefs when they conspired.
Arrayed against his strength like cliffs of ice,
Mighty they stood, confiding in their strength.
Their ranks were broken, as the frozen bergs
By the quick-rending hands of the warm spring.
Dargan he smote, and Orna of the spear :
Were they not shield-bearers of mighty fame.
Yea ! they were valiant in the fight. Their spears
Were like great pine-trees that, by peasants' hands
Stript of their branches, float adown the Rha,
When the wet winter days fill full its stream.
Each in the chase could kill the bison beast,
Even with one blow. Unmatched were they in fight :
They overthrew the ranks of banded men ;
Where'er they smote the warrior chiefs, they slew.
King Arvan met them with the shining sword :
Dargan's black shield he broke ; he pierced his breast.
He pierced his breast ; the red blood o'er the robe
Flowed darkly, as a peat-stained torrent flows
After great tempests, rushing from the hills,
Marsh-born, and with its red waves stains the mead.
Then Orna struck at Arvan. But the king
With swift-raised buckler deftly turned the blow.
The javelin's iron point sank in the earth ;
And, ere the warrior drew it forth again,
The bright sword of the king with forceful sway
Urged on, smote Orna on the shoulder-blade,
Severing the right arm from the maimèd trunk.
But Orna reeled and fell, while pallid death

Stole o'er his face, and glazed his warlike eyes.
Thus fell the Northern champions by the sword ;
Their men fell round them, scorning thoughts of flight.
King Arvan smote the warriors, and they died.—
Verily, Arvan was a mighty man.
Where are the iron masses, Ornin's boast ?
He met the iron masses with the sword.
Brave was their king, their chiefs were hardy men.
King Arvan overthrew them. As a rock,
Fallen from an overbeetling precipice,
Maketh itself a broad path through the wood,
O'erthrowing the dense ranks of forest trees ;
Thus did the king o'erthrow them, and they fell—
As sapling trees they fell, crushed by the crag.
The Southern men were vanquished ; and their king
Died on the mount, a fitting sacrifice,
Offered of Arvan to the Shining One.
Verily, Arvan was a mighty man,
Yea, mighty even in his latest war ;
Though victory smiled not, and the jealous gods
Denied him fair success, lest his great fame
Might dazzle men, dwarfing the gods' renown.
Well fought he in the adverse hour of strife.
As a strong column stands, when all around
The flames, wind-fanned, sweep through the blazing
streets,
While some fair town is sacked, and all her halls
Become the prey of fire ; as steadfast still
It stands, and the red blades beat for a time
Vainly upon its strength ; at last o'ercome
Latest of all, blent with the wreck, it falls ;—
So Arvan stood alone when hope was lost,

When Fate oppressed him, when the foe prevailed ;
And his dread sword, in unaccustomed grasp,
Fought 'gainst its former lord. By traitor hands
Given to the foe, when it sought Arvan's life,
And victory as of old was with its light ;
Then was the great king strong, resisting fate,
Scorning to yield even to the sword of doom ;
He fainted not, his heart was brave to die.
In the great battle by the Western stream,
The strife of days, when for six days the Sun,
Through all his shining, looked on warrior deaths ;
He swervèd not, when even the bravest quailed.
As on a windy night, a steadfast star
Stands still, while a whole army of black clouds
Pours on him ; but the silver-mailed god
Mutely abides, nor thinketh once of flight ;
So stood King Arvan on that deathful day,
When warrior men fell back with hearts dismayed.
In the lost strife he stood, mighty of heart ;
Alone he stood ; the armed multitude
Swept down upon him, thousands on one man.
Still for a space his broad shield fenced the land ;
His great sword, grimly working, kept the foe,
And treachery, and death, and fate at bay.
Yea ! and had mortal arm availed to save,
Even on that lost field victory had been ours ;
For of the sons of earth, who lift the shield,
None ever fought as Arvan fought that day—
Nor shall fight, till the earth, grown grey with years,
Is, by the mighty gods, who rule the skies,
Given to the White Bear, minister of wrath,
Great beast of heaven, up-eater of things made,

Even as a pleasant sop to be devoured.
Ah ! brave was Arvan, even a king of men ;
Yet did he stoop, death-stricken by the foe.
He fell, for the bright stars decreed his fall ;
And Fate o'ercometh even the mightiest hearts ;
And the white god of Death subdueth all.
Warriors and chiefs, shall we bewail such deaths ?
Not so ; he lived. His was an honoured life,
And his bright day was kingly to the close.
Look where he lieth white-faced on his bier,
His brave brow furrowed by the glorious wounds,
Through which his soul went forth to seek the gods.
Rests he not calmly, all his war-toils done ?
Lo ! he hath conquered from the foemen's hand
A warrior's death, that all-desired prize
Which soldiers crave. This is his triumph-day,
The sunset of his reign of light on earth.
Treachery, disease, and growing weight of years,
Which cumber men, bowing the stateliest form,
Robbing men of the warrior's well-famed death,
Cannot defraud him now. His stately life,
True as a sword-blade through its years to war,
Snapping like sword-blade with its latest blow,
Was warrior-like and noble to the close.
Therefore we honour him with funeral rites ;
And have prepared for him a mountain-pile
Of costliest wood, mother of sweet perfume ;
And we have hither brought all precious things,
Slaves, steeds of price, and store of shining arms,
That he may enter the high halls of Heaven
Rich, very much, as fitteth a dead king.
Now sing ye Arvan's praises, that his soul,

Stooping, may listen with well-pleased ears
Unto the praise-chant, sweet to heroes' souls."

He ceased. The mournful music of the chant
Rose from the Northmen, troubling the still air :
"Arvan is dead, the Northland's mighty king !
He lieth dead ; his battle-toils are done.

He lieth dead ; weep, weep ye for the dead.
Arvan the king, the mighty king, lies dead !

His sword was swiftest in the battlefield ;
His sword was as the lightning, swift to slay ;
It slew at will ; it quenched the lives of men.
Arvan the king, the mighty king, is dead !

His shield was glorious as the orbèd Sun ;
Golden and fair, it dazzled mortal eyes ;
It sheltered men behind its ample round.
Arvan the king, the mighty king, is dead !

His voice was like the long roar of the wave,
That, tempest-born, beats on the ocean-rocks ;
That beats the rocks, that shakes the pebbled marge.
Arvan the king, the mighty king is dead !

His eyes were as two stars, that, keen and fierce,
Glare through the night, o'erbrowed with shaggy clouds
They shone like fire, they filled men's hearts with fear :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His lips were as twin door-folds of a hall,
A council hall, whence issued forth the wise ;
Through them wise words went forth unto the world :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His hands were mighty as the earthquake god's,
That rend the walls, and shake the solid rocks ;
His hands were strong, rejoicing in their strength :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His heart was like a goblet brimmed with wine,
Fullfilled with courage even to the brim ;
His heart was brave, it overflowed with wrath :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

He clove the black ranks of imbattled men,
As a white ice-bear breasts the crested waves ;
His strength was great. He scorned the array of swords :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

He stood in battle like a sunlit rock,
A glorious rock that doth abide in strength ;
Secure he stood. Him moved the strife-storm not :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His sword is sheathed ; it smiteth not nor slays ;
It gleams not now in man-destroying war ;
It toils no more ; the red rust eats its pride :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His shield is dropt, dropt from the nerveless hand ;
It rests in peace. Its battle days are filled.
It rests in peace ; it shelters men no more :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His voice is silent, heartening not the ranks,
The Northmen's ranks, amid the storm of strife ;
His shout, like thunderpeal o'erpast, is still :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His eyes are filmèd, seeing not at all ;
Dimmed are they now, quenched is their inward flame,
Dull as wood ashes, spoilèd of their fire :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His white lips move not ; they are very still ;
Cold are they, being robbed of pleasant life.
His lips are white, are mute, uttering no word :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His hands are strengthless, terror once of foes.
Even the least gnat, born on a summer day,
May rest upon them fearless of their might :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

His heart is emptied of the wine of life,
Drained as a bright bowl at the banquet's close.
Nor hate nor love it holdeth any more :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

Through the thronged foes he maketh not swift way.
They stand secure ; they fear no more his charge ;
His charge, that scattered them, as wolf's the sheep :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

In the death-strife his place is vacant now.
The rock hath fallen that was so strong of old.
The gods' large hands have swept it from its base :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !

The king of men, low lies he on his bier ;
He lies upon his bier, his days are filled.
Weep ye for him who wakes not with our tears :
Arvan, the king, the mighty king is dead !"

The song died, ceasing from the troubled air.
Then the black priests, with torches all ablaze,
Woke in the funeral pyre the life of flame.
High rolled the volumed smoke into the heavens :
The flame rose high, full fed with precious wood.
It ate the costly garments, wrought with gold,
Covered with brodered flowers, exceeding rare.
It ate the golden vessels, and the urns,
Fit for the feasts of gods, of Arvan used
At his victorious banquetings. It ate
The silken couch, whereon the dead man lay,
Then did the fierce god, in his fiery clasp,

Fold the dead king, and kissed his warrior limbs
With those red burning lips, whose kisses keen
Purge all corruptible things from out the frame,
Leaving the body wholly spiritual,
Fitted to tread the ample fields of heaven.
But Sidroc, when he marked that the strong god
Had folded in his bright arms Arvan's corpse,
Motioned the priests to fling the fragrant urns,
Heaped high with incense, on the blazing pyre.
This did they. Straight a silvery cloud arose,
Dense as a fog-mist at the eventide,
That gathers o'er a vale-rejoicing stream.
Like a great shroud it hung over the dead,
Shone through at intervals with rays of flame,
And, hidden in its foldings, Arvan's corpse
Past from the earth into the unseen land.
For when the smoke-cloud past, and human eyes
Looked on the funeral pile, the flames burnt low,
And the dead king, Arvan, had past away.

Now as the fire waxed dim, and nought remained
Where stood the pyre, save embers fiery bright,
The priests, at Sidroc's bidding, poured red wine
O'er the bright coals of fire, with hissing streams
Quenching their ardent life. Then gathering swift
The fireless ashes, labouring silently,
They placed them in the deep, earth-hollowed vault.
After they took the slaves, women and men ;
These with bound limbs, lamenting with loud shrieks,
Were driven down into the funeral vault ;
Since meet it was that a great warrior king
Should have attendance in that other world.

Then the grave warrior Irach spake again—

“It is not well to leave the mighty king
To the unwilling ministry of slaves.
What man is he who loveth Arvan well,
Being a freeman, and will unconstrained
Forsake the gracious life of earth, and all
That makes life precious, to attend the dead?”

There Odar stepped forth from the shielded ranks,
And answering spake—“Lo! Irach, I am here,
Willing to wait on Arvan in the tomb.
Also the office claim I as of right;
For in the olden days, in battle hour
The king preserved my life, smiting the foe,
Who knelt upon my breast, with edged steel
Aiming the death blow, purposing to slay.
Now then I render to the king his own.”

But Irach answered, “Odar! great the need
In this our Northern land. Ill can we spare
Such heart and sword as thine from our array.
Bethink thee well. Thy fame is unfulfilled.
The Northland needs thee. Let some other soul
Go forth with Arvan to the spirit world?”

Then, at King Irach's words, an hundred chiefs
Outstretched their strong right hands, willing to die.

But Odar spake—“Great Irach, vain thy words.
My heart is toward the dead. Let me depart.
Have I not heard his voice in the still night,
When all men slept, bidding me rise and come.”

Then Irach answered, “Odar, strong in strife,
If the great king hath called thee, and thy heart
Is set to die; leaving the pleasant light,
And cheerful presence of flesh-wearing men,
For the dim chambers of the voiceless grave,

And the fair spirit-world that lies beyond,
Know, we restrain thee not from thy desire.
Would to the gods, the empire's heavy crown
Pressed not upon this brow its weight of gold,
Making life duty unto him who wears.
Else all unchallenged to King Arvan's grave,
Thou, as his comrade, shouldest not descend ;
But I would claim a place beside the dead."

He spake and groaned ; for he loved Arvan much.
So Odar from the ranks of shielded men
Stood forth, his brave heart being prompt to die.

And Irach spake once more : " The king lies dead.
Is there among King Arvan's concubines
A woman who doth love him passing well,
And will be sharer in his funeral couch ? "

He ceased, and from the women there arose
Petitioning voices, claiming from the king
A sleeping-place by Arvan in the grave.

Then from the ranks of concubines they chose
Ara the young, dark-eyed and beautiful.
Her they appointed queen to Arvan dead,
And set upon her head the diadem,
Jewelled with precious stones, meet for a queen.

So Odar and the concubine, unbound,
Honoured of all men, stept into the vault,
Resigning life with an all-willing heart,
For that their souls were loyal to the dead,
And scornèd death-pangs, being very true.
Far down into the vault with steadfast steps
They past, till men's eyes followed them no more.
But the black priests, aided by many slaves.
Over the tomb's mouth placed the covering stone,

Heavy, that men's strength might not move it more.
So Arvan, the great king, went to his rest.
But o'er the grave the chiefs and warrior men
Placed each a stone, mute offering to the dead,
Shaping for him a cairn of giant size.
And all the people of the royal town
Who stood around, lamenting Arvan dead,
Laboured with both hands, bringing heavy stones.
And the slaves toiling greatly night and day
Built up the mound with steel-strong masonry,
Till on the spot where was King Arvan's home,
His palace home, by Chavah burnt with fire,
Stood a great hill of stone, which even now,
Towering in sullen strength above the plain,
Men's eyes perceive—durable monument.

CANTO XXIV.

THE Sun arose, bright shining as of old.
For, howsoe'er earth's kingdoms rise and fall,
He shineth on with unsubduèd beams,
Unsuffering with the striving race of men ;
Nor doth he mourn, though sometimes filled with wrath,
He hides his face in a black cloak of clouds.
But now his glory plainly was revealed,
Filling with golden wealth the lap of earth.
He looked upon the city of the Rha,
Once voiceful, now defrauded of her sons,
A widow weeping greatly for the dead.
And wheresoe'er he looked the city's ways
Showed silent, emptied of the tides of life.
For all men who yet stood upon their feet,
Treading, unwounded and unsick, the ways,
Had gathered in the Sun-square's broad, bare lap,
Waiting the supreme oracle of Ur.

Near to the temple gates King Irach stood.
(For, Arvan dead, the warriors made him king,
Raising him high upon their orbèd shields).
His great men stood beside him. Far beneath,
The armèd multitudes, with anxious eyes,
And ears attent, waited the words of power.
But Irach, striking on the temple gates,

Cried with loud voice : "Sidroc, loved of the gods,
Irach, king of the Northland, in her need,
Seeketh wise counsel from the Sun-god's lips.
Thou therefore, opening wide the temple gates,
Show him the truth-word taught thee of the god,"

Then did the temple doors stand open wide,
Unveiling all the glories of the shrine—
Its glistening walls, and curvèd, gleaming roof
Like a great heaven of gold, o'erarching all.
Poised high in air, a wonder unto men,
On alabaster-shafted columns fair
Rested the spacious arch of burning gold,
Each column fair, such as the eyes of men
Behold not now in these degenerate days.
For the earth, ransacked by her earlier sons,
Hath not for us, men of a later day,
Rich treasures, such as men rejoiced in then.
But haply, if men find a fragment small
Of that fair stone, whereof those shafts were framed,
They treasure it, as of exceeding price ;
And wear it gem-like for an amulet,
Or jewel with it the immortal shrines,
Willing to make rich offering to the gods.
Such were the columns, greatly glorious,
And capitalled each one with beaten gold.
And all the temple, through its utmost courts,
Was rich with splendours, which the all-wide earth
Had, being greatly taxed, unwilling paid.
Under the open eye of the blue heaven
(For the vast domèd roof of sun-bright gold
Was, toward its summit, open to the sky,
Receiving light from the fair vault of day)

Stood Sidroc, by the jewelled Sun-god's throne,
Star-like, with gems that dazzled mortal eyes,
So that they might not stedfastly behold.
Around it were the priests, black-garbèd men,
Awful in aspect, being the god's friends ;
Before him was the altar, framed of gold,
Whereon men offered incense to the Sun,
When that they sought wise counsel of the god.

Such things the doors, revolving on slow hinge,
Showed to King Irach and the waiting crowd.
Then answered Sidroc : "Thou, who comest here,
Seeking wise counsel from the mighty Sun,
Approach, and offer to him a meet gift."

Then Irach drew nigh to the Sun's great throne,
And offered worship, honouring the god.
First bowèd he his crowned head, suppliant wise,
Three times to earth, touching the marble floor
Of the god's temple with abasèd brow,
Then taking from his head the diadem,
Gold-fashioned, diamond-jewelled, pearl-adorned,
He laid it humbly at the altar's foot.
Afterwards, lifting a loud voice, he cried,
Proffering entreating words unto the god,
Praying the prayer for counsel in his need,
Wise words and true, such as the immortals speak
With lips undying, in the courts of heaven,
"Immortal One ! god of my father's land,
Who rulest o'er the wide realms of the North,
And in the city of the dark-waved Rha
Hast thy chief home, a temple rich and fair,
Builded of Northmen to thy glorious fame,
Hear thou the Northman's prayer in this our need !

Have stricken down our bravest. We no more
Are, as in days of old, a strength-filled race ;
But weakened very greatly by long griefs,
And doubting sadly of our future way.
Speak ! make thy fair light shine into our eyes,
Showing us things concealed from mortal gaze ;
For thou, on high beyond the reek of clouds,
Dwellest secure, where error doth not come ;
And the gods' eyes see more than do our own.
Shall we abide within the city walls,
Defying yet the advancing Western swords ?
Or, placing all our wealth in the black ships,
Also our wives and daughters, shall we seek,
In the great island of the Northern main,
A refuge sure, renewing there our strength ?
Oh ! Sun, great god and glorious, hear our prayer—
Hear thine own people, proffering humble words !”

He spake ; and standing upright on his feet
Before the altar, taking in his hands
The vessel from the ministering priest,
He offered incense, honouring the god,
Sprinkling the perfumed grain upon the fire.

Swift rose the silver cloud toward the sky,
Bearing his prayer-words on its ample wings ;
And while its feet stood on the altar fire,
Its gleaming brow past through the windowed roof.
So rose the silver messenger aloft,
Speeding the prayer of Irach to the Sun.
Then the great god, the Sun, beheld the prayer.
With his bright-shining, death-undarkened eyes
Considering, he beheld his children's grief,
Feeling for them in his immortal breast.

Straight the god's power came down upon the priest,
Sidroc, the servant of the Shining One,
Who, white-haired, stood beside the altar fire,
Waiting the Sun's will, if it might be known.
Great is the god's power, when he visits men,
Showing the truth-words hidden from man's eyes.
Nor can a mortal bear the unveiled sight ;
For he is weak, framed of corruptible clay.
Therefore, with loud shriek of exceeding pain,
Being o'er-filled with the tormenting god,
Sidroc, down-falling, writhed upon the ground.
Dim-seen through rolling incense-clouds he lay,
O'erpowered with the presence of the god,
The Sun, who to his servant showed things
Unseen of mortal eyes, lying unborn
Within the future's all-concealing womb,
Waiting the word of the Immortal Powers.

Sudden, from out his inmost breast, a voice
Broke stormily, through his unmoving lips.
Louder than trumpet on a battle-day
That summons to the field, proclaiming strife :
" Oh ! king, seek thou in water thy defence ;
For the foe shall not pierce a watery shield."

It ceased ; and there was silence. Sidroc lay
As one death-smitten. Every warrior's head
Was bowed ; for upon every spirit weighed,
Mountain-like yet, the terror of the god.

But Irach turned, setting upon his head
The royal crown, sheathing his battle-sword.
Then to the people spake consoling words :
" Oh ! warriors, tried in arms ! valiant of heart !
Ye have done all that mortal men may dare,

But mortal might avails not against fate ;
And the great lords of heaven, with their strong hands,
Shape out, unseen of earth, the ways of men.
The gods have spoken, saying words of truth,
Showing our pathway. Let us now depart.
Not treachery of Lygrul, but their will,
Gave to King Emeth's hand the charmed sword,
Which is all-powerful on the subject earth :
On earth all-powerful, but on the wave
Brave hearts are free." There lifted he his eyes,
Pausing from words ; and he beheld afar,
Shining in light, the Northmen's world-wide home,
The tossing waves of ocean, and the gleam
Of tameless waters ; and his heart rejoiced,
This viewing. Then outstretching his strong arms,
He with a loud voice cried : " Dark-billowed main !
Friend of the North ! Thou all-unconquered sea,
Father of men ! Earth's sons are but as slaves
Compared with thy free children. Tyrants rule
The solid ground, building great walls and strong,
Stone chains, whose separate links are fortresses,
Wherewith they hold down man's subjected race,
And mightiest empires, weighted down by fate,
Losing the splendour of their ancient name,
Groan, being captive. Levelled with the dust
Lie their imperial ramparts, and the plough
Passes where once stood stately palaces,
And fanes wherein men worshipped the high gods.
For the earth-lords are hedged around by fate,
Lest in their strength they should too much confide,
And, being men, deem themselves even as gods.
Therefore free kingdoms, orphaned of their pride,

Sink, bearing on their necks the servile yoke ;
For on the broad earth men endure not long,
Also the things they build, the gods destroy,
Seeing that they have given it for a grave.
But thou art free. Strong hearts alone have sway
On thy dark waves, oh ! venerable god.
All evil spells cease with thy pebbled marge.
No chains oppress thy strong, immortal limbs.
Thine azure waves toss in the golden light,
Thou briny-tressed one. No steel of man
Restrains or maims their wild luxuriance.
They grow not less with winters of old age ;
For the all-hungry years, that eat away
Man's strength, changing the sworded giant's might
To drivelling decrepitude ; that waste
All that man made his own with extreme toil,
Beneath whose gnawing teeth even the earth fails,
Steal not one drop from thine abounding life.
But as thou wert, when the first Northman's eyes
Opened upon thee, making very glad,
With seeing of thy might, his hairy breast,
Such wilt thou be, when all men, who now dwell,
Upon the green-robed earth have past away,
And in their places, nations, yet unborn,
Rising in turn make war. Thy mighty waves,
Dashing upon the white ice-built cliffs,
Which fence the earth-world's oft polluted realms,
Are present where the life of man hath end.
Beneath the torrid heavens, far away,
In the strange southern world, where mortal foot
Findeth no resting-place, thou also art,
Mighty amongst the gods, fulfilled with strength.

All lands, thou, in thy constant loving clasp,
Embracest; as a giant, strong of limb,
Ancient of years, in his sustaining arms,
Enfoldeth little children. Thine the isles
That on thy breast repose. The spacious lands
Are but thine offspring, subject to their sire.
Alone, where man's eyes, prying very much,
Endeavour not approach, thou dwellest yet;
Holding thy still communion with great Ur,
Through the all-golden moments of the day,
And with the steadfast stars, the lords of night,
When even Ur's great eyes are closed in sleep.
Alone unslumbering art thou of the gods.
Hush of repose, forgetfulness of sleep,
Such as comes down to toil-oppressed men,
And to the gods, over thine ample life
Rests never; but thy great waves rise and fall,
Speaking in the dread language of the gods,
Rulers immortal o'er earth-fashioned men,
Thoughts awful, that rejoice celestial hearts,
Unutterable in mere mortal speech.
Oh, ever present god! in every need
Unfar from Northern men. To thee we turn,
Such is the will of golden-helmèd Ur,
Sustain thou us in our extreme distress.
Lo! we, forgetful of thee, have essayed
To build our unsure realms on the broad earth.
The gods are adverse, and the strong-based walls
Totter to their foundations. See! we come,
Great Ocean, unto thee. Aid thou thy sons,
Sustaining us with thine immortal might.
So shall our feebleness be turned to strength,

Our darkness fade into excelling light,
And the North's bitter anguish pass in joy."

Here ceased Irach ; and the air was still.
Then of the people, some, who heard him, mourned,
Wailing exceedingly, loathing to leave
The city of the Rha, their ancient home,
And seek a new land, crossing the grey sea.
But others shouted, praising the bright god ;
And Irach, who had listened to his words.
For these men were aweary of the strife,
And their souls lookèd to all golden peace.
Studious of change, their now averted eyes,
Heeded not former things, desiring new.

Now while the mingled voice of joy and grief
Rose from the Sun-square to the vault of day,
King Irach, turning on his iron heel,
Spake unto Sidroc, who, with trembling limbs,
Stood by the altar, showing him his thought,
"Sidroc, the Sun's friend, venerable priest,
Hearken to me. Make ready the Sun's throne ;
Also the treasures of the golden god,
All precious things, gems of exceeding price ;
Also the gold and silver, as the sand
On the sea-shore, or autumn's fallen leaves
Uncounted. For the god shall lead the way
Over the waters to the island realm.
He leading, we shall win desired rest."

He spake ; and Sidroc, acting on the words,
Commanded all the black-robed priests of Ur,
That they should make them ready for the flight
Over the blue waves to the ocean isle.

Next Irach stretching out his strong right hand,

Spake to the people, honouring the Sun's words,
"Men of the North, renowned much in war,
Make ready all your weapons, sword and shield,
Arrows and bows, also swift whirling slings;
For we, who now depart, shall yet return,
Renewed by rest, upon some other year,
If the gods suffer to regain the sway,
Now wrested from our battle-wearied hands.
When the black ship, struck by the tempest might,
Is scourged across the billow-roughened main
Doth she abide, braving the god-sent storm?
Not so! well knoweth she resistance vain.
Above, the heavens are black with menacing clouds,
Around the wave-vales yawn, each one a grave.
Broken her masts, her sails wind-riven hang
In fluttering fragments, emptied of all aid;
Her oars are strengthless in the hurricane.
Then o'er the unpitying ocean fleeth she,
Towards the shielding island, known of old,
Beneath whose lea, she, guarded from the storm,
May refuge her, repairing former griefs.
Mourn not, as though our empire had an end,
While in our breasts we bear undaunted hearts,
No foe may rob our kingdom of its life.
Go ye, make ready each man precious things,
Wherewith, borne o'er the briny ocean world,
We may establish, in the northern isle,
A city and a home safe from the sword."
Let us make ready, therefore, from our wealth,
Each man that he desires. This let us bear
In the black ships over the ocean world,
Ungrieving over that we must resign.

For should men, such as we, bewail the loss
Of homes, or slaves of price, or silken robes?
Not so; for we are Northmen, and we bear
Great gifts and goodly, given us of the gods,
Left to us of them in extreme distress,
Our own sharp swords, and freedom. Wanting these,
Rich men are slaves. Having them, men have all."

Then when the king had spoken, saying words,
Multitudes lifted up their hands on high,
And swore that they would hearken to the Sun,
Obeying his commands with joy of heart,
Following the king unto the edge of earth.
Yea, if need were, to where the watery world
Ceases, and they on the brine-cleaving ships
Coming, where men since Ur built up the earth,
Never arrived before, could lean their hands
On the great arch of blue, where from the wave
It springeth upward, reaching beyond thought,
Bearing upon its back the gods' great hall.
Thus then spake these men—"We will serve the king."

But others, turning, greatly loathed his will;
They hearkened not unto his kingly words,
For their heart clung unto their ancient home.
Thus then these answered—"We will not depart."

Then the chiefs cried, speaking unto the king,
"O king! behold; for men resist thy will,
Saying that they will here await swift death:
Thou therefore, lest the thought rebellious grow,
Command that they be smitten with the sword."

But Irach answered—"Blood enough hath flowed
On battle-plains; also the white-haired Moon
Hath rained dire plagues down upon Rhaon's ways,

Whereby within our walls have many died.
Let these suffice. For if, with adverse hearts,
Men will abide within the city walls,
Hardening their hearts, not heeding the dread god,
Nor following his throne whither it leads,
Let the foe smite them with their sharpened swords ;
Our hands shall not be on them. O'er the Rha,
In that wide region of the royal town,
Protected by the river's breadth of waves,
They shall abide, for we constrain them not.
Yet of this be they warned : The end draws nigh,
When they shall suffer loss by chains or death ;
For the Sun wills that Rhaon's walls should fall."

Then the chiefs spake answering to him again :
" O king ! as thou hast said, so be it done :
Our swords obey thee, sparing at thy will."

Then to the chieftains—Aslak, Rohn and Bir,
Arar and Ervar, Khala, Noak, Ahr,
Elvan and Gylar, Arau, Odan, Mor,
Isli and Goran, Bor, Uran, Iraine—
King Irach spake, giving them orders meet :
" Aslak, make ready the sea-cleaving ships,
Gathered that lie beside the marble quays
Of the great city, having travelled far,
Even by ocean ways, for many months,
From every haven in the peopled North.
These hath our care provided, toiling much,
Provendered are they, and the path is brief.
Let men ascend them with unfearing hearts,
Knowing slight danger waits on the retreat ;
For grey-haired Boro leads them o'er the wave,
Having much knowledge of the unquiet deep.

Arar and Ervar, Arau, Odan, Mor,
Isli and Khala, Uran and Iraine,
Wise with much wisdom, strong with the great
strength

Born of long wrestlings with dire perils past—
Arise, go forth ; order the people well,
Arraying for departure. All the host
Range in their thousands ; choosing fitting ships
For every thousand. Four times o'er the wave
Each ship must pass, bearing her load of men,
So shall her thousand reach the island shore.
Thus shall ye send them forth. The weak and sick,
The women and the children : let these first,
Placed in the black brine-cleaving ocean ships,
Find refuge in the ocean-girdled isle.

Then let the men go forth, each in his place ;
The young first and the unwarlike. Last of all
Shall the strong lifters of the shield retire.
This do with utmost speed. Weak is the foe,
Through that great strife wherein King Arvan fell.
Anon will war return with strength renewed,
Assailing once again the battered walls.
Short breathing-space is ours. Wisely and well
Use we the respite ; while the days are still,
And the Sun smiles propitious on our path,
And sleeps the Moon-God's wrath. So shall we pass
Securely, lossless, o'er the level brine,
Leaving behind us but dispeopled walls,
And treasure-spoiled homes, peopled with slaves
And base men, who desire ignoble life,
Or who, thought-blinded, mock the Sun-God's will."

Thus spake King Irach ; and the chiefs went forth

Doing his bidding. From great Rhaon's port
They chose them ships, uncounted as the leaves
That lie close-massed on the chill Autumn earth.
Also they ranged the people, ordering them,
As Irach said, by thousands on the shore.
But the unwilling, and the host of slaves,
Being a multitude exceeding great,
They placed beyond the river of the Rha
To bide their fate, honouring King Irach's word ;
Then they commenced, unpausing, swift retreat.
Over the tide the black ships ceaseless passed,
Following grey Sidroc and the Sun-God's throne,
Thus past great Rhaon's children from the war,
To the broad isle, refuge of weary men.
Nor did King Emeth vex their sad retreat ;
For that he had scant power upon the wave,
And the black Northern ships were of him feared.

Now, in the island of the Northern seas,
There is a bay, where the earth's outspread arms
Embrace much water in their friendly clasp.
Therein is worthy anchorage for ships ;
For a great river, rolling from afar,
Here pours its dark tide forth to join the main ;
And a long rock, with steep, precipitous sides,
Dusky and grey, outstretched before its mouth,
Even like a dog stretched out before the door
That guards from rude assaults its master's home,
Bulwarks from ocean's wrath the haven sure.
Thither came all the North's sea-cleaving ships ;
By thousands came they, making dark the wave.
Numberless were they, as the countless fish,
That swarm into a bay when Spring is come ;

And the great god, lover of mortal men—
The ancient, long-haired, venerable Sea—
Guides them towards the dusky-shelving shore,
Unknowing of their fate, not fearing death,
A pleasant food to hunger-vexèd men.

They came and went, returning on their ways
For many weeks ; great toilers, toiling much,
Bringing the multitude from Rhaon's walls
Unto the harbour in the ocean isle.

Thus was fulfilled the mandate of the king.
Therefore the haven called they Irach's bay,
And to these days, though still revolving years,
Even many hundreds, rounded by the sun,
Have since rolled on their unregarded way,
Men call it by the name of the great king.
Yet, for that earth's fame is a thing unsure,
Forgotten have they whence it won the name,
Oblivious of the memories of the past.

Thus then the great deep-wombèd ocean ships
Wearied themselves, oft-traversing the main.
First brought they to the isle the Sun-god's throne,
The priests, and all the treasures of the shrine,
Things marvellous to behold, such as man's tongue
Availèth not to utter, such as hearts,
Greedy for riches, picture not in dreams,
Emeralds and rubies, as the heapèd stones
That margin ocean's tides ; gold like great heaps
Of yellow corn after the harvest toil ;
And garments many-hued, curiously wrought,
Such as the gods delight in, such as men,
Them honouring greatly, offer at their shrine.
This did they ; for the mighty god, the Sun,

Desired to lead the Northmen o'er the wave ;
Thus then the priests past foremost to the isle.

Now when the great ships, treaders of the wave,
Had borne the Sun's throne and the black-robed priests
Unto the isle, refuge of Northern men,
Next o'er the wave took they the aged men,
The women, and the children, all the souls
Unslain in warfare, whom the plague had spared.
Then bare they all the spoil of many lands,
Through the long years, gathered of many men
In the Rha city ; wealth of all the earth.
Gold, gem, and varied carvings wonderful,
Wrought out by men, who, in the elder days,
Had in them the wise spirit of the gods.
Last went the warriors o'er the unsmooth wave,
Bearing their shields and swords, strong still of heart,
Though fate was adverse, and the foe prevailed.
Only the guard was left to watch the walls,
All valiant men, swift smiters with the sword.
These tarried, being twice five thousand men,
All armed thoroughly with broad shields and swords,
Spears, also bows, and quivers stored with shafts.

Also across the Rha the mixed crowd
Of men who scorned the Sun-god's steadfast word ;
Of men unwarlike, fearing hardship much
In the black ocean isle ; of men o'erweak
For journeying, shrinking from the length of way ;
Also of men hard-hearted, resolute,
Who deemed the strife not o'er ; and that the stars
Would even now rescue great Rhaon's walls
From the o'ermastering hands of stranger men ;
All these, their wives and children, and the slaves

Tarried ; these hoping by propitious words,
And deeds obedient, rendering homage meet,
Haply that Emeth's rage might be appeased ;
Those deeming that the gods with forceful will
Would yet destroy the rude invading host,
And guard the sacred city from the sword.
Thus they abode over the dark-waved stream,
Cut off from all return ; for every bridge—
Such was King Irach's will—was broken down.
So was fulfilled the word of the great king.

In the third moon the task drew to its end,
Perfectly rounded to accomplishment.
Then the king's warriors, having wrought his will,
Came to him, showing him the task fulfilled,
Saying : " Great Irach, monarch of the north,
Behold, the word hath ripened, as was meet,
Unto the harvest. In the ocean isle,
Thy children wait, desirous of thy face ;
Now therefore rise and come, leaving the land."

Then Irach answered to his warrior chiefs :
" Let us arise, and offer to the god,
The Sun, who rules the unascended heaven,
The greatest sacrifice that mortal man
Hath ever offered since the distant days
Whereof no record liveth in men's minds.
For I will give this city of the Rha,
Even the whole city, unscathed by the foe,
Yet unpolluted by his conquering feet,
Even as a victim unto eating flame.
First, make ye ready by the harbour's mouth
Ships large and strong, whereon to make retreat,
Then pass through all the city's countless ways,

With ready torches waking in each home
The life of flame. To the red ruin give
Her palaces ; also spare not the shrines
Of the immortal gods. Them too destroy.
For better is it that consuming fire
Should feed upon them, they yet being pure,
Than that the foe should, with unfearing tread,
Impious, pollute their reverend majesty.
Therefore destroy them. At the circling walls,
That keep even yet at bay the insulting foe,
Let the fierce conflagration take its birth.
Therefrom shall the destroyers seek the stream,
Burning where'er they pass. The circling flames
Shall guard them from the foe. Slow be their march,
So it be sure. No heart, even though full-filled
With hardihood, will venture on the assault ;
For courage cannot storm the walls of flame.
Only the harbour spare ye, firing not ;
This, and the Sun's fair shrine, we, last of all
Will offer to the Sun in sacrifice."

Forthwith the men obeyed him. They went forth
From standing in the presence of the king,
And gave great Rhaon's dwellings to the flame,
Nor left within her walls one home unfired,
Saving that portion, by the river wave
Islanded from the all-devouring god,
Wherein the slaves and the rebellious men,
Who would not hearken to King Irach's voice,
Were left, as they desired, unto their doom.
Also the harbour and the Sun-god's shrine
They left unkindled, honouring Irach's word.

Then, their task done, the chiefs, returning, sought

King Irach, where he stood before the fane,
Viewing the work of ruin, and they spake :
“ King of the North, we have obeyed thy word,
Look forth upon the city. Far beneath
Flame Rhaon's myriad roofs. Lo ! every shrine
Blazes, and every street sends blackly up
The volumed smoke to the far vault of heaven.”

And Irach looked, then spake : “ So may the
 gods

Behold the sacrifice with favouring eyes,
Considering our suffering and our toil.
Now make ye ready fire, straight kindling flame
Throughout the temple courts, till the god's shrine
Shines like his storm-red form at eventide,
Ere he departeth, leaving earth to night.”

This did the chieftains forthwith. Then the king
Departed, slow-retreating to the ships.
Him followed sadly all his warrior men ;
For that they left unwillingly the land
That had beheld their glory and renown.
Nor did they lift their grievèd eyes from earth,
Desiring not the sight of that great flame,
Wherein the tower-fenced city died her death ;
For in that conflagration their own homes,
Wherein their children round their hearth had played,
Were by the red teeth of the fire devoured.
Thus, then, they past to the black-sided ships,
A mourning company of sad-faced men.
Leaving behind them Rhaon overthrown,
Charred by the flame. Last, Irach and his chiefs
Up-clomb the brass-beaked vessels' lofty sides,
And drifted down the stream slow to the main.

So Irach and his men over the wave
Past in the black ships to the island realm,
Sustaining still their souls with life of hope,
Though now defeated, leaving on the shore
Ashes of homes, and bodies of the slain.

Meanwhile King Emeth's warmen, having marked
The flames gigantic rising to the heavens,
Came near, and looked upon the city's wreck.
They entered, also, through the fallen gates,
Both here and there, where the down-dying fires
Forbade not near approach. Their eyes beheld
The ruined, half-consumed, dispeopled town.
Also, they marked the flight of Irach's ships
Over the wave; and, after search, they found
A slave, and then another, who remained
Hid in the towers that stood upon the walls.
These, questioned of them, told the naked truth,
Showing both of the fire, and Irach's flight.

Then the men, Emeth's servants, came to him,
Unveiling things that were, saying: "Great king!
Irach, and all his armed men, have past
In the wave-cleaving ships far o'er the sea,
Seeking safe refuge from our victor swords.
Yet ere they fled, with their own hands they flung
Red fire into the city's countless halls,
Willing to ruin that they might not hold.
Now do great Rhaon's death-fires mount to heaven;
Her streets are one large furnace heated white,
Wherein all wealth and beauty that were hers
Melt fast away. Yet haply, for the town
Is vast, we, striving, may from out the wreck
Rescue enough to be a royal home—

A city, greatest yet of all on earth.

What wilt thou ? for thy servants wait thy word."

And Emeth stood one moment very still,
Thinking within him thoughts of heavy grief;
For to his heart, sent of the gods, there came
A vision of the future day, that showed
His own fair city, in the fertile West,
Now joyous in her queenly comeliness,
Wrapt even in such a funeral sheet of flame.

Soon the dream broke, and Emeth op'd his lips
In anger, speaking thus great Rhaon's doom.
Thus spake he: "The great city, sinning much,
By wasting, tyrant-like, th' oppressèd earth,
Hath merited destruction. Let it pass,
Even with its king. Whelm ye in flame her halls,
Sparing not one. Level her walls with earth,
Till not a shelter is where once she stood,
Whereto men coming yet, may house again."

Then, at King Emeth's word, went forth the men,
His servants, to fulfil his stern command.
They drew toward the region, o'er the stream,
Where tarried yet the remnant of the North,
Who hearkened not to Irach and the gods,
Filled with vain hopes, expecting aid divine.
Then, when they marked the gates fast barred and closed,
And on the ramparts shields and swords of men,
They armed them once more for renewèd strife,
And strengthened them against the city's walls.
But when they drew anigh unto the gates,
With ladders for the storming of the walls,
The slaves, rebelling, rose against their lords,
Opening the brazen doors, greeting the foe.

So Emeth's warriors, entering, held the town
From gate to gate, even to her utmost bounds.
They made pact with the slaves, setting them free ;
But all the Northmen smote they with the sword,
Also the aged men and little ones.
But all the women took they for a prey,
Doomed to be toilers in a distant land,
Makers of bread, moistened with many tears.
Then they destroyed Rhaon, sparing not ;
Destroying utterly her stately halls,
And homes wherein the sons of men had dwelt,
Even all that war and the great fires had spared ;
So the great city was a ruinous heap.

Then paused the desolators, and returned,
Showing unto King Emeth all the truth.
"Great king, we have performed thy dread command.
No city is where once great Rhaon stood ;
We have destroyed it, even to the ground."

And the king spake—"The vengeance of the gods,
Not ours, hath overthrown the haughty one
Who sat as god, ruling the mourning lands.
Such fate awaits, who, with the demon's aid,
Seek greater might than fitteth mortal man."

He said, and from his side he loosed the sword,
The fatal brand, stolen by Chavah's craft,
And given through Lygrul's treachery to his hand.
"See ye," he said, "the sword, potent in war.
Fair shines its hilt ; its blade is yellow gold ;
A fair possession seemeth it to men.
Where is King Arvan, wielder of the sword ?
Where the great realm o'er which his sceptre swayed.
The realm is shattered. Arvan too is not.

Now know, the sword in Arvan's warrior hands
Hath wrought much harm, against King Arvan's will,
Harm both unto himself, and to his realm.
It ill beseemeth man, whose arm is weak,
And whose heart flesh, to wield the sovereign power,
Which fitly 'longs to the immortal gods.
Wherefore, oh ! chieftains, ere the fateful sword
Draw down in turn red ruin upon me,
And on my people, I will offer it,
If haply so we yet may be forgiven
For using aught that hath a demon power,
Unto the dread god of the azure sea.
For it is meet that we should lay the blade
Within his ancient purple-robèd arms ;
He holdeth safe treasures that are his own ;
Ships, buried gems, armour, whatever men
Much sorrowing have lost in ocean storms,
Nor e'er win back from his retaining clasp."

So Emeth spoke, establishing the thought,
Making it sure ; for that he feared the sword,
Lest it should wound him in the after years,
As it had wounded Arvan, king of men.
Also he hated it within his breast,
Since, for its sake, Mawrawh, his child, had died.
And, after many days, when the great host
Had rested from their war, rejoicing much
In the god-given victory of their hands,
He turnèd him, and sought again the West.

Thus Emeth, having conquered, went his way,
Slow-journeying back through the grey forest-world,
Till that he reached the river of the West,
Yellow, once stainèd much with blood of men.

Now flowing calmly onward to the main.

This, then, he traversed, with his armed men,
And dwelt once more in his own land remote.

Then did his men make ready many ships,
Gathered from all the harbours of the coasts.
But the great king, Emeth, the lord of men,
Himself, in a broad bark, black-sided, vast,
Preceding all, standing upon the prow,
Bore the charmed sword. Then when the briny
wave

Of the mid-ocean tossed around the ship,
And land had faded from the seaman's eyes,
Who watched upon the lofty royal mast;
With his own hands he gave it to the deep,
That swallowed up in its capacious maw,
As 'twere a little crumb, the mighty sword,
Destroyer of so many realms of men.
Then clamoured all the seamen with glad shouts,
Announcing rest again given to the world.
But Emeth turned him, once more seeking land,
Having great joy, for that his task was done.
And ever afterward, year after year,
In that fair Western land of Emeth ruled,
Even to the days of history-writing men,
The sword was offered to the mighty deep,
Memorial of that first sacrifice.

Thus Emeth's land rejoiced, content of heart.
But the North land, defeated, greatly mourned;
Its face was black through agony of heart,
And shame of soul, by reason of defeat.
Yet failed not courage though the realm lay low;
For that the northern gods, the supreme Sun,

And the clear-faced, eternal, shining Stars,
Made Northmen strong ; strong as the nation's sire,
Whom from the granite rock they hewed long since,
With careful toil of their immortal hands,
(Still may be seen of mortal eyes the chasm
Whence Ar, great father of the North, was hewn).
Then in his breast placed the red fire of life,
And gifted him with the wise heart of man.
Therefore the Northmen are more strong to bear
Than the soft nations of the shining South,
And peopled West, that ever buys and sells ;
For Northmen aye are lovers of the sword.
And thus they framed, even from the kingdom's
wreck,

A statelier realm, shorn of the cankering wealth,
That, like an ulcerous sore, had eaten deep
Into great Rhaon's life. On the broad isle,
In the white sea that stretches toward the North,
They did renew their power, and waxed strong.
So, after many years, the Northern name,
'Stablished anew by Irach's guiding hand,
Rose greatly glorious, as in olden days ;
For the wide ocean thenceforth was their realm,
And where their war-ships floated were they kings.
Also the new realm far surpassed the old
In length of life, since for two thousand years
The glory waned not of its warrior crown.
But Irach died, he being full of days,
And honoured. And his sons ruled o'er the land,
And his sons' sons ; even till failed the house,
For twenty generations crowned with sway ;
Then his name ceased slowly from men's lips.

Also the island-realm in later days
Became a vanished memory of renown.
For all things on this earth come to an end :
Only the Sun, ruling supreme in Heaven,
And the bright Star Gods, have immortal sway.



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